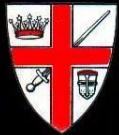


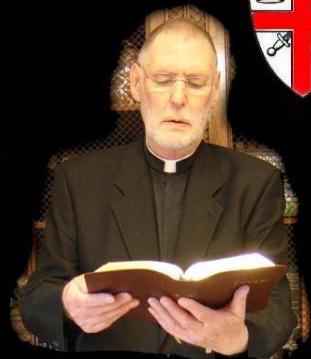


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**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet
and a light unto my path.
Psalm 119: 105**



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Evangelical House Churches



Berea Bible Handbook – Part Seventeen
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Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James
(Titus and Philemon by Arno C. Gaebelein – Public Domain)



*We realise the highest Truth in Christ only if we are fully prepared to renounce
the hungry cry of our desire-life.*

General Introduction

Paul's letter to Titus, like his two letters to Timothy, was addressed to one of his companions in the ministry and, also like his letters to Timothy, may properly be referred to as a pastoral letter. Its chief theme is designed to instruct Titus in the qualifications and duties of a servant or teacher in the church.

Titus is also referred to by Paul as his "son" in the faith, indicating that it was directly through Paul's ministry that this young man heard the Gospel and devoted his life to the service of God. To this "son after the common faith," Paul extended Christian greetings: "Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour." (chapter 1:4) In verse five of the first chapter, Paul informs Titus that he had left him in Crete to "set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city." Then he outlines for him the qualifications of those to be appointed, as follows:

"A bishop (or elder) must be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers."—ch. 1:6-9

In this epistle, as in many other places in the New Testament, the real hope of the church is kept before the reader, emphasizing that Christianity is not merely a way of life, or just a moral philosophy, but the great plan of God for the redemption and recovery of a lost world, through the Messiah, the Christ. Christ had already come to redeem the world. He had returned to heaven, but would come again at his Second Advent, and then the glorious plan of God would be consummated. Paul wrote about this saying:

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee."—ch. 2:13-15

The 'peculiar people' referred to here are those who are being called out from the world through the power of the Gospel, and invited to suffer and to die with Jesus, promised that if they are faithful in this they will live and reign with him. This has been the work of the Gospel Age. With this fully accomplished, the 'good works' of God, his design to bless all the families of the earth through Christ and his church, will be effected.

Paul's Letter to Philemon

Paul's letter to Philemon reveals one of the greatest human interest stories to be found anywhere in the Bible. Philemon was one of the Christian brethren in Colosse. He was an owner of slaves which was common in those days. The fact that the apostles seemingly did nothing to correct this evil which had fastened itself upon human society would indicate that they did not understand it to be the Christian's work, while in the flesh, to reform the world. But Paul loved slaves who were Christians, even as he loved their masters.

One of Philemon's slaves ran away from him, and went to Rome. This was during Paul's imprisonment in Rome. This slave, Onesimus, probably had become acquainted with the apostle while he was being entertained at the home of Philemon, and he contacted Paul in Rome. Since Paul was a prisoner, it is obvious that Onesimus elected to see Paul of his own free will. What his motive was, we do not know. However, he must have remembered the apostle favourably, and perhaps also had been impressed by the Gospel which he heard Paul preach in the home of his master.

As a result of getting in touch with Paul in Rome, this slave accepted the Gospel and became a Christian. This presented a problem for Paul, and also for Onesimus and Philemon, his master from whom he had escaped. Paul meets the situation by persuading Onesimus to return to Philemon, and to ask his forgiveness for the wrong done.

To help bring about a genuine and Christlike reconciliation, Paul wrote a letter to Philemon and gave it to Onesimus to deliver when he returned to his former master. It was a difficult situation, but Paul rose nobly to the occasion, manifesting loving tact and consideration for both master and slave. We do not know what the result was, but we may assume that the reconciliation was complete, and that all rejoiced together in the Lord.

The Book of Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews is the last of Paul's letters recorded in the New Testament. While it is addressed to the Hebrew Christians, it seems likely that it was intended for some particular group, or ecclesia of Jewish converts, rather than all Jews who had accepted Christ. The tendency toward lack of full faith and zeal on the part of those to whom the epistle was addressed could hardly be true of all the Jewish converts of Paul's day.

This fact concerning the spiritual condition of those to whom the letter was written reveals Paul's motive in writing the letter, and helps to add greater meaning to many things which he writes. First, we will quote a few texts from the letter which indicate this background of thought:

"We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip."—ch. 2:1

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.”—ch. 3:12

“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”—ch. 4:1

“When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.”—ch. 5:12

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised.)”—ch. 10:23

“Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”—ch. 12:3

“See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.”—ch. 12:25

Since the letter was written to strengthen the faith of Jewish believers, he used language, logic, and scriptures with which they would be particularly familiar. He assures them that the God who spoke to their fathers through the prophets had now, “in these last days,” spoken unto them through his Son, Christ Jesus.—ch. 1:1,2

Throughout much of the first chapter Paul endeavors to enhance the reader’s appreciation of the high position of authority occupied by the beloved Son of God through whom he now speaks to his people. He mentions the honorable position of the angels in the arrangements of God, and shows that Jesus was highly exalted above these—“anointed … with the oil of gladness” above his “fellows.” (ch. 1:9) It is because of the high authority vested in Jesus, through whom his Father speaks to us, that we should give ‘more earnest heed’ to the things we have heard.—ch. 2:1

Perhaps the trials and sufferings of the Christian way were weakening the faith and cooling the zeal of the Hebrew Christians. In the second chapter Paul explains that it is God’s purpose to bring “many sons unto glory” (vs. 10), even as he had exalted his beloved Son Jesus to glory. He explains that for Jesus the path to glory was one of suffering, and implies that the same is true of the ‘many sons’ who will be joint-heirs with him in glory.

In the third chapter Paul reveals that in our association with Jesus we are members of a priesthood of which he is the “Apostle and High Priest.” (vs. 1) One of the chief works of a priest is to offer sacrifice, so by explaining this viewpoint of the Christian life Paul is again reminding the Christian that he must expect to suffer; for in this age God’s priests do not offer animals in sacrifice as they did in the Jewish Age, but instead, offer themselves. (See Rom. 12:1)

In the third chapter Paul again dips into the experiences of natural Israel to get a lesson of warning for those who are members of the Gospel Age ‘house of sons.’ He reminds the reader—and the Jewish believers to whom the letter was first written—that the Israelites failed to enter into rest, but instead continued to wander in the wilderness for forty years, all because of their unbelief.

The fourth chapter enlarges upon this thought of “rest” for the people of God. “We which have believed do enter into rest,” he says. (vs. 3) And then in the tenth verse he writes, “He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.” Earlier in the chapter Paul speaks of the rest into which God entered, following the work of Creation, and he explains that now believers are resting in the same way. In other words, God is allowing Christ to accomplish his purposes toward the human race, and we, too, are trusting in the finished work of Christ.

Having introduced Jesus in the opening chapter as the exalted mouthpiece of the Heavenly Father, Paul continues to emphasize the truly high position the beloved Son of God occupies in the Divine plan, and how much, therefore, he should mean to us. In the closing verses of the sixth chapter, he reminds us of the promise God made to Abraham, and of the sealing of that promise by his oath. Then Paul tells us that this hope is centered in the oath-bound covenant with Abraham. We quote:

“When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”—vss.13-20

The Jews were familiar with the Aaronic order of priesthood, but the idea that Melchisedec, who predated Aaron by many centuries, was a recognized priest of God who foreshadowed Christ, was ‘strong’ meat for the Hebrew Christians. Not strong in the sense of being complex or difficult to understand, but from the standpoint that it put a severe test upon their faith.

Actually it is one of the simplest, and also most beautiful, symbols found in the Bible. Melchisedec, unlike Aaron, was both a priest and a king. The subjects over whom he ruled also brought their sacrifices to him. Thus he was a type of

the combined offices of priest and king as they will function in Christ during the thousand years of his reign.

God dealt with the Jewish nation through the Law Covenant which he made with them at Mt. Sinai, Moses serving as mediator. They broke this covenant, and through the Prophet Jeremiah (ch. 31:31-34) God promised to make a “new covenant” with them. In the eighth chapter of Hebrews Paul mentions this New Covenant. He explains that Jesus is its servant, or Mediator.

Paul cites this as evidence that Jesus came to fulfill the promises which God had made to Israel, not to set them aside. In this chapter he does not go into detail concerning the ‘ministry’ of this covenant as he does in II Corinthians, chapter three, where he explains that the followers of Jesus are also “able ministers” of this New Covenant in association with Jesus. This means that the New Covenant is now being made only in the sense that its ‘ministers’ are being chosen from this world and prepared for the great future work of administering the laws of the covenant.

In the ninth chapter Paul uses an illustration that would mean much to a Jewish Christian; namely, the Tabernacle of the wilderness. The services of that Tabernacle, particularly the Day of Atonement service held each year, pointed forward to the sacrificial work of this age. Jesus offered himself once for all, and through the merit of his blood his followers are able to offer themselves in sacrifice, “holy, acceptable unto God.”—Rom. 12:1

The lesson is presented at least partially for the purpose of explaining to these Hebrew Christians why they were suffering—that it was because the age of kingdom glory and covenant glory had not yet begun; that now the ministry of the covenant was one of sacrifice; and that not until the Second Advent will Jesus “appear” to give the salvation promised through the New Covenant and through the kingdom.—ch. 9:28

Throughout the opening verses of chapter ten Paul continues the lesson of type and antitype; and in verse twenty-two he makes his practical application to Christian faith and steadfastness. “Let us draw near” to God, “with a true heart in full assurance of faith,” he writes. “Let us consider one another,” he continues in verse twenty-four, “to provoke unto love and to good works.”

Verses twenty-six and twenty-seven of this tenth chapter are a timely warning to all Christians, and also reveal an important fact of the Divine plan. They read: “If we sin wilfully after that we have received a knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”

While this passage indicates the possibility of one losing the favor of God and going into what the Bible calls the ‘second death,’ it distinctly shows that this can happen only to those who first of all have received a knowledge of the

Truth. In other words, it is descriptive of willful sin against God, knowing all the circumstances involved.

The statement in verse thirty-one, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” is not a threat of eternal torture; it is merely a reminder that those who sin wilfully after coming into Christ no longer can claim the covering of his robe of righteousness. Therefore, they have nothing to protect them against the sentence of death which is the wages of sin. None of humanity can stand before God and meet the requirements of his perfect law in their own righteousness.

The last five verses of this tenth chapter encourage a patient waiting on the Lord, and emphasize again that the glorious fruition of Christian hope is at the return of Christ. Paul said that it would be only a “little while” from his day until Christ did come. This expresses God’s viewpoint of time. With him a thousand years are as one day, “and as a watch in the night” when it is past.—Ps. 90:4

The entire eleventh chapter is devoted to a lesson on faith in which Paul cites the faithfulness of many Old Testament characters, and their fidelity to God and to his promises. It is one of the most magnificent chapters of the Bible. In the opening of the twelfth chapter he refers to the characters he has presented to the reader in the eleventh chapter, and speaks of them as a “cloud of witnesses” with which the Christian is “compassed about.”

Paul then cites the greatest of all examples of faithfulness, even Jesus, the “author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” He then admonishes us to “consider” Jesus. The Greek word here translated ‘consider’ more literally means, ‘make a comparison with.’—vss. 2,3

Paul wanted the Hebrew Christians to whom he wrote this letter to realize that regardless of the extent to which they had suffered as a result of their stand for Christ, they had not endured nearly as much as their Leader had. “Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin,” he reminded them.—vs. 4

In this chapter Paul also explains that some of their suffering may have been in the nature of chastenings from the Lord. But this, he explained, they should accept as an evidence of Divine love, “for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.”—vs. 6

He speaks of Esau, who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, and admonishes us to keep “looking diligently” lest we be like that “profane person.”—vss. 15,16

Beginning with verse eighteen, and on to the end of this twelfth chapter, Paul uses another very powerful method of exhortation; namely, presenting to the reader some of the glorious things in prospect for those who cannot be shaken

away from their faith and their faithfulness. To do this, he refers once more to the type—to the time when the Law was given on Mt. Sinai.

Paul likens what happened back there to what will occur in connection with the inauguration of the New Covenant. The shaking mountain, the fire, the trumpets at that time, were symbolic of a worldwide social upheaval which occurs in conjunction with the inauguration of the New Covenant and the establishment of the kingdom.

According to the Greek text, Paul said that we are ‘approaching unto’ this antitypical scene. That was true of the Early Church, and it has been true of the brethren all down through the age—the “little while” of waiting of which Paul speaks. (ch. 10:37) It is still true of all who have not yet made their calling and election sure.

Paul speaks of the antitypical mountain to which we are approaching as “mount Sion,” and he says that we are also approaching unto “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”—vss. 22-24

This is a glorious prospect, and should stimulate all the Lord’s people to greater faithfulness in their service to God. Paul sums the matter up in verse twenty-eight, saying, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”

One of the important lessons set forth in the closing chapter of this epistle, which in the first instance was written to Hebrew Christians, is found in verses ten to thirteen. In these verses the apostle reminds us of the typical Day of Atonement service in which a bullock and a goat were sacrificed, their blood sprinkled upon the mercy seat in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle, for sin, and their bodies burned without the camp of Israel.

Paul indicates clearly that the followers of Jesus participate anti-typically in those sacrifices. It is clear that the bullock in that typical ceremony pointed forward to Jesus, and that the goat was typical of his followers, those who would be members of his body, his church. Just as Jesus suffered and died outside of the “camp” (ch. 13:11), that is, because he was rejected by the world and cast off, so it is our privilege to suffer in the same way. Paul says, “Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.”—vs. 13

Thus did the apostle, in the concluding chapter of his letter, point out to these Hebrews that their suffering was no cause for discouragement, but rather the reverse, for it indicated that they were having the privilege of suffering with

Christ, the Captain of their salvation; that they were being prepared for glory in the same manner that he was, and that this was God's will for them. It is likewise God's will for all who have taken up their cross to follow the Master.

The Letter to Titus

By Arno C. Gaebelein (Public domain)

Introduction

Titus, to whom this letter (epistle) is addressed, was a Greek convert of the apostle (Titus 1:4; Galatians 2:3). We have little knowledge of him. From the Epistle to the Galatians we know that he accompanied Paul and Barnabas in their journey to Jerusalem to attend the council in which the question of the relation of believing Gentiles to the law was decided (Acts 15:1-41). From the Second Epistle to the Corinthians we learn that Paul sent him to Corinth to gather the collection (2 Corinthians 8:1-6) and that he discharged the duty in a zealous way. "But thanks be to God, who put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you. For indeed he accepted the exhortation; but being more forward, of his own accord he went unto you" (2 Corinthians 8:16-17). Paul also stated in the Second Corinthian Epistle that he had no rest when he did not find Titus (2 Corinthians 2:13), but when he came Paul was greatly comforted. "Nevertheless God, who comforteth those who are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus" (2 Corinthians 7:6). The Epistle shows that he was in the island of Crete. Paul visited this island in company with Titus, leaving him there. Titus probably did not stay long in Crete, for Paul asked that he should meet him at Nicopolis (Titus 3:12). This is all that can be said on the person of Titus.

The contents of this Epistle are of the same nature as the Epistles to Timothy, though the departure from the faith so prominent in the Epistles to Timothy is less prominent in this Epistle. That the truth must be after, or according to, godliness is especially emphasized; the truth must be manifested in a godly walk.

The Division of the Epistle to Titus

The Epistle contains practical instructions. We make three divisions.

I. INSTRUCTIONS AND WARNINGS (1)

II. THINGS WHICH BECOME SOUND DOCTRINE (2)

III. IN RELATION TO THE WORLD AND FALSE TEACHERS (3)

Chapter 1

I. INSTRUCTIONS AND WARNINGS

- 1. The salutation (Titus 1:1-4)*
- 2. Instructions concerning elders (Titus 1:5-9)*
- 3. Warnings against false teachers (Titus 1:10-16)*

Titus 1:1-4

Paul calls himself in writing to Titus “a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ,” for he speaks in these introductory words of God’s elect, and their faith in Him; and the promise of eternal life, God, who cannot lie, gave before the dispensations began; and that His Word is now manifested through preaching which was committed unto him by our Saviour-God. God’s elect are those who have trusted in Christ. They have personal faith in God and know His love and are in relationship with Him. But such a faith and relationship demands godliness; therefore the statement, “The acknowledgment of the truth which is after godliness.” These two, truth and godliness, belong together. If the truth is given up or not held, then godliness also is given up; the truth must be manifested in godliness. As to statement on the promise of life before the ages began, see annotations on 2 Timothy 1:9.

Titus 1:5-9

Paul had left Titus in Crete. From Acts 2:11 we learn that the inhabitants of Crete were present on the day of Pentecost and heard Peter preach. These Cretan Jews may have brought the gospel to the island. Titus is commissioned by Paul to set the things in order which were wanting, and to appoint elders in every city. (For discussion that bishops are elders see annotations on 1 Timothy 3:1-16.) We do not find the same intimacy between him and Titus as that intimacy and confidence which existed between Paul and Timothy. He does not open his heart to him as he did to Timothy. He invests Titus with authority to appoint elders and states the qualifications the elder must possess. These qualifications are also mentioned in the First Epistle to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:1-7). Here is added that their children must be faithful and not accused of riot or of being unruly. The bishop must also be blameless as God’s steward, not self-willed (headstrong), not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, no seeker of filthy

lucre. What he is to be is given in Titus 1:8-9. “But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good, sober-minded, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word according to the doctrine taught, that he may be able to exhort with sound doctrine and to convict the gainsayers.” Thus we have again that godliness and sound doctrine belong together.

Titus 1:10-16

He states that there were many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers especially they of the circumcision. The Judaizing teachers were at work among the Cretans. Titus must have been especially distasteful to them, for he was an uncircumcised Greek. These Cretan Jews who claimed to have accepted Christianity worked evil in the assembly. The apostle demands that their mouths must be stopped, for they subverted whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of base gain. The national traits of the Cretans are then described. One of their own prophets had said, “The Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, idle gluttons.” This is a quotation from Epimenides, who lived six hundred years before Christ. The Cretans were classed with the Cappadocians and Cilicians (all beginning in the Greek with a “K”) as the most evil and corrupt in the Greek world. And Paul testifies to the truth of it, “This witness is true.” They must be rebuked sharply, so that they may be sound in the faith, “not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.” These Judaizing teachers were ascetics, forbidding certain things, making rules for the outward conduct. Certain things were forbidden by their ordinances and commandments; yet though they were fasting and continent, they were, because unregenerated, inwardly defiled and unbelieving. Paul brands these Judaizers in this Epistle as “defiled and unbelieving,” with a confession that they know God, but in works they denied Him. He speaks of them as abominable, disobedient, and to every good work reprobate.

Chapter 2

II. THINGS WHICH BECOME SOUND DOCTRINE

1. *Adorning the doctrine of our Saviour-God* (Titus 2:1-10)

2. *The grace of God and its work* (Titus 2:11-15)

Titus 2:1-10

“But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.” The sound doctrine or healthful teaching must be accompanied and witnessed to by the right condition of soul, a godly character. The doctrine of God our Saviour must be

adorned in all things. Aged men are exhorted to be temperate, grave, sober-minded, sound in faith, in love and in patience. Sound doctrine must of necessity produce such a character. Aged women are to be reverent in demeanor, not slanderers (1 Timothy 3:11) nor to be enslaved by too much wine. In the First Epistle to Timothy deacons are exhorted “not to be given to much wine.” Here the exhortation is in the original in a stronger form, for the Cretans were known, and especially the women, for being slaves of strong drink. They are to be teachers of what is good. This is not contradicting 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12. The teaching of the aged woman is here defined. She is to teach young women to be sober, to love their husbands and their children, to be discreet, chaste, busy at home, good, obedient to their own husbands; that the Word of God may not be blasphemed. These are important instructions. They show that the Christian woman’s sphere is first of all at home. The disregard of this has more than once wrecked Christian families. This is the great danger in these last days to put women into a place which does not belong to her.

Young men are also to be discreet. Titus who is charged to deliver these exhortations was himself to be a pattern of good works. His example was to confirm his word. In teaching he was to show uncorruptness. Likewise gravity, setting forth the doctrines with dignity and in all seriousness, and sincerity. (What a contrast with certain evangelists and preachers of our day, who act like clowns and make sport of sacred things; instead of teaching the young reverence, they drag down holy things!) “Sound speech that cannot be condemned”—so that those who oppose may be silenced, unable to speak anything evil of the servant of God. When the preacher or teacher does not practise what he preaches it becomes a great detriment to sound doctrine. How great a stumbling block this is!

Servants (slaves) are next exhorted to be obedient to their masters. They were not to forget their place. Though they had been saved and become children of God and heirs of God, their earthly relationship was that of slaves, and as such they were to strive to please their masters in all things, not answering them in contradiction, not purloining but showing all good fidelity, “that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.” Chrysostom said: “The heathen do not judge of the Christian’s doctrine from the doctrine, but from his actions and life.” The world does the same today. And so even slaves in their low estate could bear a witness to the Saviour God by adorning His doctrine.

Titus 2:11-15

“For the grace of God, bringing salvation for all men, hath appeared, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously

and godly in the present age, awaiting the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all lawlessness, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."

This is a blessed and comprehensive statement of the gospel and Christianity. It may be looked upon as embodying all the great apostle taught in his God-revealed gospel, in a practical way. The grace of God hath appeared, and it appeared in the person of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him His grace is made known. His finished work is the source of it. It flows from the cross. And this grace comes to man with salvation. It brings salvation, not to a certain class of men, but it brings salvation for all men. Because all men are lost, and therefore in need of salvation, unable to save themselves; the grace of God bringing an unconditional, a perfect and eternal salvation hath appeared, offering that salvation to all. And when this salvation is accepted by faith in the Son of God and the believing sinner is saved by grace, the same grace teaches how to live and walk here below in newness of life.

Grace instructs to renounce all ungodliness and all lusts that find their gratification in this age. But grace does more than that; it supplies the power to do this. It bestows upon the believer a new nature and the Holy Spirit, and walking in the power of all this, the lusts of the flesh are not fulfilled. And renouncing ungodliness and worldly lusts, the believer, saved by grace, is to walk with grace as his guide, instructor and power. That walk as concerning ourselves is to be soberly; as to our fellowman it is to be righteously; as to God, godly. It teaches something additional. We are to await the blessed hope, "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ." He who gave Himself for us, to redeem us from all lawlessness, [With respect to the conduct of Christians towards the world, grace has banished violence, and the spirit of rebellion and resistance which agitates the heart of those who believe not, and which has its source in the self-will that strives to maintain its own rights relatively to others. The Christian has his portion, his inheritance, elsewhere; he is tranquil and submissive here, ready to do good. Even when others are violent and unjust towards him, he bears it in remembrance that once it was no otherwise with himself. a difficult lesson, for violence and injustice stir up the heart; but the thought that it is sin, and that we also were formerly its slaves, produces patience and piety. Grace alone has made the difference, and according to that grace are we to act towards others (Synopsis of the Bible.) who has purified us unto Himself a peculiar people, He is coming again. He will appear in glory, and grace has given us the blessed promise that we shall be with Him in glory, beholding His glory and sharing it also. And this blessed hope is the

most powerful motive for a sober, a righteous and godly walk in this present age.

These things Titus was to speak, to exhort; and also to rebuke with all authority. This is still the calling of every true servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 3

III. IN RELATION TO THE WORLD AND FALSE TEACHERS

CHAPTER 3

1. Instructions (Titus 3:1-8)

2. Warnings (Titus 3:9-11)

3. Directions (Titus 3:12-15)

Titus 3:1-8

He asks Titus to remind all believers to be subject to rulers, principalities and powers (Greek: Magistracies and authorities, Romans 13:1), to yield obedience and to be ready for every good work. An ancient historian, Diodones Siculus, speaks of the riotous insubordination of the Cretans. They were to speak evil of no man, nor were they to be contentious, but show all gentleness and all meekness towards all men. Our own rights must be yielded, but never the rights of God. If authorities demand what is against sound doctrine then God must be obeyed more than man. This is indicated by the exhortation “to be ready for every good work.” Meekness towards all men is to characterize those who are no longer of the world, but who are still in it. Such meekness towards all, not only towards fellow-believers, but towards all men, adorns the doctrine of our Saviour-God, and is a commendation of the grace of God which offers salvation to all men.

Then follows an additional reason why Christians should be gentle and meek towards all men. “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.” It is a look backward, what they were in their unregenerate condition. These are the true characteristics of man in the flesh. Here is an answer to the question, What is sin? Sin is foolishness, disobedience, deception, slavery to lusts and unsatisfying pleasures, a life of malice, envy and hatred. It is

lawlessness. And such is the natural man in all ages. What was true of these Cretans nineteen hundred years ago is true today of every unregenerated person.

And then follows a “but.” (See Ephesians 2:13.) “But when the kindness and love to man [“Love to man” in the Greek is “Philanthropy.” Our Lord Jesus Christ is the great Lover of men, Philanthropist, as no human being could ever be.] of our Saviour-God appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which He has shed upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that having been justified by His grace, we might be heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

For such as the Cretans were, and we all are, the kindness and love of our Saviour-God appeared; and this Saviour-God is Christ Himself, He by whom and for whom all things were created. All who have believed and trusted in the kindness and love of God as manifested in Christ can testify in fullest assurance, “according to His mercy He saved us,” and own it likewise that it is “not by works of righteousness which we have done.”

And this is accomplished by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. The washing (or bath) of regeneration is the new birth. Of this our Lord spoke to Nicodemus (John 3:1-36) and also to His disciples when He washed their feet. “He that is washed (bathed) needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all” (John 13:10). He spoke in these words of the fact that His disciples, except Judas, were born again, and therefore they were clean every whit. The washing has nothing whatever to do with water-baptism; water-baptism cannot save nor help in the salvation of a sinner, nor produce regeneration. What is the renewing of the Holy Spirit? It is distinct from regeneration. The Holy Spirit is the active agent in the new birth; imparts the new nature and then indwells the believer, and as such He does His blessed work by renewing the inward man day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16). He is shed upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, and gives power to all who walk in the Spirit. On the fact that the word “regeneration” is found only once more in the New Testament (Matthew 19:28) the late F.W. Grant made the following interesting comment in connection with this passage.

“The Lord promises to the twelve that ‘in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit upon the throne of His kingdom,’ they also shall ‘sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’ ‘The regeneration’ is in this passage the millennial state; but thus we may see already the difference between it and the idea of new birth, whatever the connection may be between these. The millennial regeneration is not a new life infused into the world, but it is a new

state of things brought about by the new government over it. Thus, the Lord speaks of the throne of the Son of man and of thrones for His disciples. The throne of the world in the hands of the Perfect Ruler is, in fact, what brings about the regeneration. Righteousness now reigns. In the new earth it will dwell; but in the millennium there is yet neither the full reality; nor, therefore, the full permanence of deliverance from evil. Righteousness reigns, and evil is not suffered any more, but the full blessing waits to be manifested in that which is eternal and not millennial. The subjugation of evil, Christ's foes put under His feet, goes on through the millennium, in different stages, towards completeness. It is the preparation for eternity, but not the eternal state itself.

"it is plain, therefore, that there is a parallel between the stages of God's preparation of the earth for blessing and that of the individual man. The present stage of the earth is that out of which the Christian has been delivered, the state of bondage to corruption, the dominion of sin. The present state of the Christian is that which the earth itself waits for, the time when the power of sin will be broken and righteousness will reign. For us righteousness reigns now, but the conflict with sin is not over. This, in the millennium, will be fully seen at the end, when there is once more the outbreak of evil, Satan being let loose. What follows this is the dissolution of the present heavens and earth and the coming of the new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness, just as the dissolution or the change of the body makes way for the perfect eternal state with us. Thus there is a complete parallel, which we cannot be wrong in accepting as that which will help us with the expression here. 'The washing of regeneration' is the deliverance from the power of sin, which is no more tolerated, but which is not, by any means, wholly removed. 'The renewing of the Holy Spirit' is that which is constantly needed to supplement this, although the word used does not speak of a mere reviving or refreshing constantly, but rather of a change into that which is new--thus, of ways, habits-as the light more and more penetrates, and the word of God manifests more and more its perfection and its power for the soul."

Being then saved according to His mercy by the washing of regeneration and receiving the Holy Spirit and having been justified by His grace, we become also heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The practical side, godliness in life and walk, is once more connected with these preceding statements of sound doctrine. "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men."

Titus 3:9-11

Foolish questions and genealogies, contentions and striving about the law must be avoided, for they are unprofitable and vain. How many of these things are about us! Some are more occupied with the ten lost tribes and their supposed recovery, according to the Anglo-Israel hallucination, than with the grace and glory of God; and others are given to questions of law, like Seventh-day Adventism--that evil system. All these things are indeed unprofitable and vain. The heretic is one who sets up his own opinions and then causes division in the body of Christ. If such a one after a second admonition continues in his ways, he is to be rejected, for he proves that he is self-willed and not subject to the Word of God--"Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself."

Titus 3:12-15

In the closing directions and greetings Artemas is mentioned first; his name does not occur elsewhere. Tychicus is mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:12. He was sent by Paul to Ephesus ; he probably was sent later to Crete to take the place of Titus. Zenas the lawyer and Apollos (Acts 18:24) were travelling companions, and the apostle expresses his loving care and interest in them.

"Observe also that we have the two kinds of laborers: those who were in personal connection with the apostle as fellow-laborers, who accompanied him, and whom he sent elsewhere to continue the work he had begun, when he could no longer carry it on himself, and those who labored freely and independently of him. But there was no jealousy of this double activity. He did not neglect the flock that were dear to him. He was glad that any who were sound in the faith should water the plants which he himself had planted. He encourages Titus to show them all affection, and to provide whatever they needed in their journey. This thought suggests to him the counsel that follows: namely, that it would be well for Christians to learn how to do useful work in order to supply the wants of others as well as their own" (Synopsis of the Bible).

Then the final exhortations, once more "to maintain good works" and his final greeting. "All that are with me salute thee. Greet them that love us in the faith. Grace be with you all."

The Letter to Philemon

By Arno C. Gaебelein
(Public domain)

Introduction

This beautiful little letter addressed by Paul to Philemon does not occupy the right place in the New Testament. It should be put after the Epistle to the Colossians, for it was written at the same time as that Epistle. Tychicus carried from Rome the two Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians. Onesimus, his travelling companion, received from the prisoner of the Lord this personal letter to Philemon. It was therefore written at the same time as Colossians, during the first imprisonment of the Apostle Paul, about the year 61 or 62. Its genuineness cannot be doubted, though some critics have done so. Dean Alford says: "The internal evidence of the Epistle itself is so decisive for its Pauline origin--the occasion and object of it so simple, and unassignable to any fraudulent intent, that one would imagine the impugner of so many of the Epistles would have at least spared this one, and that in modern times, as in ancient, according to Tertullian and Jerome, 'Sua illam brevitas defendisset.' ("Its own brevity would be its defence.") The objections raised against this Epistle we do not need to state nor investigate, for they are pure inventions and do not require an answer.

The occasion and object are both plainly indicated in the Epistle itself. Onesimus, a slave, probably a Phrygian, who were considered the lowest of all, had run away from his master, Philemon, who was a Christian. It is more than probable that he had stolen money from Philemon (Philemon 1:18). He was attracted to Rome, the great world-city, thinking perhaps he would be undetected there. What happened to him in Rome and how he came in touch with Paul is not made known in the Epistle. He may have been in dire want and destitution. Perhaps he had heard Paul's name mentioned in his master's house and learning of his presence in Rome as a prisoner, he got in touch with him. This we know, that he heard the gospel preached by the apostle, and believing, he was saved. He then told the apostle his story and Paul sent him back to his master with this precious letter. And Onesimus who returns to Philemon is no longer "unprofitable"; not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved" (Philemon 1:16).

The Epistle itself shows the sweet and tender character of the great man of God who penned it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It has been remarked,

“Dignity, generosity, prudence, friendship, affection, politeness, skillful address, purity are apparent. Hence it has been termed with great propriety, ‘the polite Epistle.’”

Suggestive are Luther’s words on this letter to Philemon: “The Epistle sheweth a right noble, lovely example of Christian love. Here we see how St. Paul layeth himself out for the poor Onesimus, and with all his means pleadeth his cause with his master; and so setteth himself, as if he were Onesimus, and had himself done wrong to Philemon. Yet all this doeth he not with power or force, as if he had right thereto; but he strippeth himself of his right, and thus enforceth Philemon to forego his right also. Even as Christ did for us with God the Father, this also doth St. Paul for Onesimus with Philemon; for Christ also stripped Himself of His right, and by love and humility enforced the Father to lay aside His wrath, and to take us to His grace for the sake of Christ, who lovingly pleadeth our cause, and with all His heart layeth Himself out for us. For we are all His Onesimi, to my thinking.”

Chapter 1

1. *The greeting (Philemon 1:1-3)*
2. *Recognition of Philemon’s faith and love (Philemon 1:4-7)*
3. *Concerning the reception of Onesimus (Philemon 1:8-21)*
4. *The conclusion (Philemon 1:22-25)*

Philemon 1:1-3

He speaks of himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus; the Lord had made him a prisoner. He addresses Philemon (meaning: friendly, loving), the beloved, and his fellow-laborer. Apphia was probably the wife of Philemon; Archippus is called “fellow soldier”; he ministered in the Colossian assembly (Colossians 4:17). Greeting is also extended “to the church” which was gathered in the house of Philemon. While the Epistle is addressed to Philemon personally and Paul appeals to him in behalf of Onesimus, the gathered assembly was equally to be interested in this runaway Slave, who was now returning as a brother beloved and therefore to be received by them in Christian fellowship. The Lord had received Onesimus and he had become through grace, a member of the body of Christ; he belonged to the Colossian assembly. Therefore in addressing the Colossians Paul had written of Onesimus as “a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you” (Colossians 4:9).

Philemon 1:4-7

He thanked God for Philemon, making mention of him always in his prayers. He did not know Philemon personally, but had heard of his love and faith toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints. And he prayed for him “that the fellowship of the faith may become effectual by the acknowledgment of every good thing that is in us toward Christ Jesus.” His faith was to manifest itself still more by exhibiting every good thing which Christians possess to the glory of Christ. With these words of commendation, recognition and encouragement, he opens the way to plead for Onesimus.

Philemon 1:8-21

For this reason, because of love which was in Paul’s heart for Philemon, he did not use his authority to enjoin upon him what was meet as to the reception of a good-for-nothing slave, who had been saved by grace and accepted in the Beloved. He beseeches instead, and that “for love’s sake”—his love for Philemon and Philemon’s love for Onesimus, for he was entitled to this love, being a saint in Christ. And he beseeches, “being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of the Lord.” Courteously he repeats “I beseech thee,” and then he mentions him who was so dear to his own heart—“I beseech thee for my child, whom I have begotten in my bonds, who in times past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me.” Onesimus (meaning helpful) shows the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A miserable, unprofitable slave, a runaway thief, had become a child of God, born again, and the loving servant of the Lord presses him to his bosom, calls him “my child” and speaks of him as being now profitable to him and to Philemon. Oh! the wonders of divine grace.

“Whom I have sent again; thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels. Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel; but without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.” What loving words these are! He gives Philemon to understand that Onesimus had endeared himself in such a way that he was as dear to him as his own heart. He would have liked to retain him and keep him at his side in Rome, for he would have performed all the services for Paul which Philemon would have rendered to him if he were in Rome. But without Philemon’s consent he would do nothing, so that his action might not be of necessity, forced by what Paul had done, and not voluntarily.

“For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him forever, not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to

me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord?" How delicately he expresses it all! He does not speak of Onesimus as having run away, as trying to escape forever from serfdom, but that "he departed for a season." God's providence is beautifully touched upon, when Paul thus states that he perhaps departed for a season (Greek, an hour) so that Philemon might receive him forever, not now as a slave, but above a slave, a brother beloved. And so that Philemon might not take offense at Paul asking him to receive his runaway slave as a brother beloved, he tells Philemon that he is a beloved brother especially to himself--and then how much more to Philemon who had a claim on him.

Human slavery, so universal in apostolic days, so full of misery, is indirectly dealt with in this letter to Philemon. It may be rightly called the first antislavery document and petition ever written and presented.

"Paul lays here broad and deep the foundation of a new relation between master and servant, a relation in which, while there is subordination of the one to the other, there is also a common brotherhood to be acknowledged and an equality before God to be maintained. Christianity would melt the fetters from the enslaved by the fervour of its love. Men's method commonly is, to strike them off by armed revolution" (Professor Moorhead).

And he continues, "If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee aught, put that on mine account." Philemon 1:17 connects well with Philemon 1:12. If Philemon counted Paul as in Christian fellowship, he is to receive Onesimus as if he were Paul, "receive him as myself." Onesimus had probably confessed his theft to Paul, and again he uses the choicest words to approach this delicate matter. He does not call it "theft" outright, but writes "if he hath wronged thee" and that again he softens to "or oweth thee aught," then he declares himself ready to make good the loss and assume the debt in place of the slave Onesimus--"put that on mine account." These five words "put that on mine account" are translated in Romans 5:13, by the word "impute." How blessedly this illustrates the gospel. indeed this Epistle to Philemon is a perfect and practical illustration of the gospel of grace, the gospel Paul preached, and which is unfolded in the larger Epistles. What the gospel does for the poor slave of sin, how he becomes a son and a brother, profitable instead of unprofitable, a member of the body of Christ, may be traced in these verses.

He wrote this Epistle, not as he usually did, by an amanuensis, but with his own hand! That shows again what a fine character he was. He had full confidence in

Philemon not alone that he would grant him his request, but that he would even do more than he had asked.

We do not know from Scripture what became of Onesimus. According to the “Apostolical Canons” he was emancipated by his master. Another tradition says that he became a servant of the Lord ministering in Macedonia, and that he was martyred in Rome. We shall meet him with all the other saints in glory.

Philemon 1:22-25

Paul during his first imprisonment always anticipated his release; he and others prayed for it (Philemon 1:22). And so he expects to come to Colosse, and asked Philemon to prepare him a lodging. The salutations from Epaphras, Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas and Lucas, with the word of blessing, conclude the Epistle.

Leviticus and Hebrews

Nearness and Response

By H. J .Vine

One of the great distinctions of this third book of the Bible is found in the name given by Leah to her third son. She called him *Levi*, which means *joined* or *united*, for she said, “Now this time will my husband be *joined unto me!*”

The near place of the Levites is seen in the fact that they were joined to Aaron (who was of the same family), the high priest who could enter the holiest on the ground of blood-shedding. The Lord said to him, thy brethren of the tribe of Levi shall be “*joined unto thee*” (Num. 18:2, 4). We are also told that He said of the Levites, “Instead of the first-born of all the children of Israel have I taken them unto Me,” and yet they are rarely mentioned separately in Leviticus, where the priests, the sons of Aaron, are prominent.

Joined to Aaron, and representing the Children of Israel, the Levites kept the charge of the tabernacle; and nearness in relation to the presence of the Lord is indicated in Leviticus 1:1, for Jehovah is not there speaking from a burning thorn-bush, or from a quaking mount which filled the people with fear, but “*out of the tabernacle*”! There His presence was known, there His holiness was vindicated by sacrifice, there response to His redeeming work was shown in sweet-savour offerings, there the high priest bore the names of all upon his breast and upon his shoulders immediately before God; and, in relation to this

holy nearness in the tabernacle, every detail of daily life was correspondingly ordered.

In this day of God's saving grace, when the assembly in Christ is being called out, those who have eternal redemption in Him through His precious blood are brought into the reality of what was so strikingly typified in Israel. They were redeemed from Egyptian bondage, and they offered what pointed onward to the present "sacrifice of praise," thanksgiving and worship—the "spiritual sacrifices" which are offered up by Jesus Christ, having been "made nigh" in Him. So intimate is the present nearness, we read, "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit"; and, "Both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren"; yea, still more closely are they "joined" or "united" to Himself, they "*are members of His body*"!

"So nigh, so very nigh to God,

we cannot nearer be,

For in the Person of His Son,

we are as near as He."

Aaron might represent Israel before Jehovah, but the Son of God now brings us into the presence of the Father. Through Him we have access to the Father by the Spirit. "Much more" does "the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God," purge the conscience from the merely "dead works" (like those of Israel) to "serve the living and true God" with the sweet-Savour offerings of praise and worship, for the worshippers of today being once purged have "no more conscience of sins." CHRIST is their one and only High Priest now, and He has "gone into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God FOR US" (Heb. 9:24). Everything in the holiest spoke of Christ in diverse ways. The ark, the mercy seat, the gold, the purple, the scarlet, the fine twined linen yea, and the very tabernacle itself signified His glories in various aspects.

"In Him we every glory view,

Of safety, strength and beauty too;

'Tis all our rest and peace to set

Our Sanctuary, Lord, in Thee"

Contrasting what is now ours permanently with what went before, we find that Leviticus foreshadowed what we have the substance of in Hebrews. It is true, both Leviticus and Hebrews speak of the tabernacle, but the latter of “the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man”! Both speak of Moses, but the latter of Him who is “counted worthy of greater glory than Moses”! Both speak of Aaron, but the latter of God’s Son, “a Priest forever after the order of Melechisedec” who was king as well as priest! Both speak of sacrifices, but the latter of the “one Sacrifice for sins” which needs no repetition! Both speak of sacrifice for sin, but the latter of Him who “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself”! Both speak of offerings to God, but, while the former speaks of the priest that “*standeth* daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices,” the latter tells of Christ who offered one sacrifice and “*satdown in perpetuity at the right hand of God*” (Heb. 10:12, N.T.)!

“In God’s own presence now for us

The Saviour doth appear,

The saints as jewels on His heart,

Jesus doth ever bear.”

The beautiful prefigurings given to us by the Holy Spirit in Leviticus help us greatly to understand the present things which are ours in Christ. Great indeed, however, are the contrasts between, the two! In the offerings of old God found no pleasure, we are told, but in the one perfect offering of Christ He has found complete satisfaction! There was no seat provided for the priest of old, but God said to His Son, “*Sit Thou on My right hand*”! The One who offered Himself has now the most exalted seat in the universe, and He is our “GREAT PRIEST over the house of God”! Perfect is the peace, eternal the rest and holy the boldness which are consequently ours in His presence. God’s holiness has been perfectly met in the one Sacrifice! He can therefore say of us, “Their sins and iniquities will I remember NO MORE”! in contrast to the “remembrance again made of sins every year” (Heb. 10:3), the worshippers today being “once purged,” as we said, have “NO MORE conscience of sins” (v. 2)! and so satisfactorily has the work been done in regard to which Jesus has sat down, the Holy Spirit conclusively declares, “There is NO MORE offering for SIN”! No more remembrance of sins on God’s side! No more conscience of sins on the worshippers’ side! No more offering to be made on Christ’s side! Leviticus pointed *on* to a work to be done! Hebrews points *back* to a work finished! and also points up to the Completer of that work!

“High at God’s right hand is seated

Christ, the Lord, the living One,

All His toil on earth completed,

All His work for sinners done.

In the glory,

See Him! God’s Eternal Son!”

It took both Moses and Aaron to typify Christ, for He is both the Mediator and the High Priest; and, like Moses who spoke on God’s part, God’s Son has spoken the words of God; also, like Aaron who represented the people before God, Jesus represents us in His presence now. Moses and Aaron adorned with the garments of glory and the holy crown went inside together, so Christ has gone into heaven itself. He is the Holy One there, and He is there for us. Moreover, so great is He, where two or three are gathered together unto His Name He Himself is present. Visible glory filled the tabernacle in the wilderness, but Jesus Himself is in the midst of His own who are rightly gathered today. Faith recognizes His presence before we see Him in glory, and boldness is ours even now to enter into the holiest, boldness by the blood of Jesus! Full assurance of faith gives us to enter where He is.

Jehovah spake to the people by Moses, “Ye shall be holy: for I Jehovah your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2). Every detail was ordered according to that. The without was to correspond with the within.

In chapter 1:1 He speaks “out of the tabernacle,” and in the last chapter all estimation is “after the shekel of the sanctuary” (27:3) The book begins with the burnt-offering ascending as a sweet savour to the Lord wherein the offerer is “accepted,” and it closes with persons and things being “holy unto the Lord”—the words “*the Lord’s*” and “*holy unto the Lord*” being repeated over and over again. This nearness and the response to Him are expressed in abundant offerings to the Lord, and in the divinely ordered details which He gave of instructions as to sweet-savour offerings and others also prefigured the work of Christ by which we draw nigh as worshippers today; and the ways which are well pleasing in His sight take character from this. In the case of Israel, Leviticus instructed them as to the minutest details, as to priestly consecration, as to food, uncleanness, relationships, separation, land, houses, cattle, etc., but in regard to the redeemed today much stands in contrast to what was said to Israel; and we read in Ephesians 2:2:10 that “we are God’s workmanship created in

Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” The practical details given in Ephesians flow from the knowledge of saving grace, whereas those in Leviticus from law; nevertheless they pointed forward to the “better” things of which the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks.

When the glorious consummation of the wonderful designs of God is fully reached, we read, “Behold *THE TABERNACLE OF GOD IS WITH MEN*, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God,” Near to Him then for ever, there will be a full response to God in love and holiness, in praise and worship, and in every beautiful detail of living activity amidst scenes of stainless glory. All will be intimately and eternally “JOINED” TOGETHER in abiding splendour and grace.

Surveying the vast extent of the divine designs opened before our view, we see that the ruin in Genesis yielded the redemption in Exodus, and the redemption in Exodus yielded the tabernacle approach of Leviticus, which indicated vividly the present realities made ours through faith, and in the Spirit’s grace and power—realities entered into by faith now, and soon to be actually displayed in counselled glory, when God’s tabernacle is seen shining forth in heavenly brightness and blessedness.

Letter to the Hebrews

Purpose of the Letter to the Hebrews

To exhort and encourage the Jewish Christians to remain faithful to Christ Jesus and not to turn back to their former Judaism.

Theme of the Letter to the Hebrews

A Word of Exhortation (cf. Hebrews 13:22) To Hold Fast to The Christian Hope without Wavering (cf. Hebrews 3:12-14; 10:23; 10:35-39).

Introduction

The letter or the book to the Hebrews may have been the most profound book written in the New Testament period. It is also one of the most difficult books for modern people to understand. A recent commentary described Hebrews as "a delight for the person who enjoys puzzles". The literary form of the book is uncertain. The author and time of writing are unknown. The logic and flow of thought are unusual for most modern people.

Despite the many areas of uncertainty the book of Hebrews yields rich results to the person who will study it patiently and carefully. It is a rich resource for Christology and practical Christian guidance. It breathes the air of the Old Testament, but blows the fresh wind of the Spirit making all things new. Hebrews is a study in pastoral care for a church under pressure. It is the rich literary and theological testimony of an author who has found Christ to be the fulfilment of all the hopes of the Old Testament. Hebrews leads a pilgrim people down the path of faithfulness and confident trust.

The traditional method by which modern Biblical scholarship studies a book leads to frequent frustration for those studying Hebrews. Normally, a student seeks to learn all that can be determined about the author, the date, the place of writing, the audience, the literary form, and the purpose of the book. Most of these areas lead scholars to dead ends. Though clear answers to these questions are not always available, the process of asking them can lead to helpful information about the book.

From the absence of an address it has been doubted whether this is an epistle. The closing chapter however, with not a few confirmations less marked

throughout, is proof positive that it has a real epistolary nature, though, like the letter to the saints in Rome, somewhat of a treatise also. Its contents demonstrate beyond just question that the epistle before us was directed to Jews professing the name of the Lord Jesus. For all would be truly applicable if not a Gentile were called at this time to believe. Beyond all other books of the New Testament, it is as to every point of doctrine, and even exhortation, based on the ancient scriptures familiar only to the people chosen of old. And the believing remnant of Jews as being the true " people " is strikingly kept before us throughout in chaps. I2: 17 ; 4: 9 (as the people of 'old in v. 3 ; 7:5, 11, 27); 8: 10 ; 9: 7 (29 bis; 10: 30 ; 11: 25 ; 13: 12); as in 1 Peter 2: 9, 10 bis (2 Peter 2: 1; Jude 5). So indeed it is with the apostle Paul (Rom. 9: 25 bis ; 10: 21; 11: 1, 2 ; 15: 10 (21 pl.) ; 1 Cor. 10: 7 ; 14 21; 2 Cor. 6: 16). The only exception is Titus 2: 14, where " people " is used morally.

This stamps it with a character different, whoever the writer might be, from every other. It appeals to the Old Testament from first to last as no other epistle does. Yet the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets are made to speak, as it were, with new tongues. They all render a distinct, united, and glorious testimony, once earthly in the letter, now heavenly in spirit, to the Lord seated at God's right hand, His proper position for the Christian. To lead on the believing Jew to know and enjoy Christ where He is, to worship and walk in this faith, is the prime object of the bright, glowing, deeply interesting, and instructive Epistle that claims our attention.

It is therefore the inspired exercise of the teacher's gift rather than of the apostle and prophet announcing absolutely new revelations. There is no such language here as " I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery," as in Rom. 11: 25. There is not a word about his apostleship here, as in the two Epistles (letters) to the Corinthians; of the mystery of Christ, as to the Ephesians and the Colossians ; nor even " this we say unto you by the word of the Lord," as to the Thessalonians. The writer speaks of others as " those that heard " the Lord ; he himself is here a " teacher of " Israelites "in faith and verity." He simply sites and reasons on the ancient oracles as well as histories ; he applies prophecies and expounds the types of the law ; but rarely, if ever, does he unveil the magnificent scenes of the latter day, when Israel shall be blessed, under Messiah and the new covenant, and the nations also in a circle, concentric indeed but not so close. He writes with the utmost fullness of Christ's exaltation on high in view of the heavenly calling and those who now partake of it before that day. In chap. 4: 9 he touches on the broad fact of " a sabbatism " which remains for the people of God when the wilderness is past, though without detail, when we who now believe have our " better " portion on high. We may also compare chapter 12, when the circle of the future glory, earthly and

heavenly, is grouped as that to which we have come by faith already, though only to be established and displayed when the Lord appears.

Christ is never spoken of as the Head, nor consequently is the one body wherein the old differences vanish, nor that new man wherein is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all. The nearest approach to unity is that the Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one. The assembly is of firstborn ones, viewed as an aggregate of individuals and not as the body of Christ. These who composed it were heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; but joined to the Lord as one spirit and of His body is not said here.

This may be conceived by some as implying another hand rather than Paul's. But the inference is baseless. For though he alone develops the mystery concerning Christ and concerning the church, it is only in the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians, with the First to the Corinthians practically and in that to the Romans allusively. In the rest of his epistles we find " the body " no more than in that to the Hebrews ; and this as distinctly in the ordering of the Holy Spirit, as in those which contain it fully. Our individual relationships are no less important than our corporate. The divine design regulates the topics introduced as much as their appropriate handling. Each epistle or other book of Scripture is perfect for the purpose God had in view when He inspired each writer. As the main object in that to the Hebrews is Christ's priesthood with its necessary basis, due adjuncts, and suited results, and as this is for the saints individually, the one body of Christ could not fittingly fall within its scope, if it were a divinely inspired composition, whether by Paul or by any other. Its central doctrine is, not we one with Him as members of His body, but He appearing before the face of God for us. Abiding forever, having His priesthood unchangeable, He is able to save to the uttermost those that by Himself approach God, as He always lives to intercede for them. The same persons compose the body of Christ ; but the associations are wholly distinct and only compatible through the fulness of Christ.

Some have wondered why Paul, if the writer, should not have given his name at the beginning. The peculiarity is at least equally true of any writer. It would in fact be more strange in one who had written no other epistle. If the great apostle wrote, its analogue is in the First Epistle of John, who does not prefix his name there, though in the two lesser he addresses himself " as elder " in a style unmistakably his own. In the Revelation, where the difference of the subject-matter calls for a manner of writing wholly distinct from either his Gospel or his Epistles, his name appears alike in the preface and in the conclusion. Is not this self evidently as it should be ?

Now supposing Paul to have written the Epistle (letter) to the Hebrews, it is not difficult to suggest weighty motives for his putting forward, not his own name and apostolic authority, but such a treatment of the Old Testament scriptures as must carry divine light and firm conviction to all who weigh them before God. That the Hebrew Christians were prejudiced and disputatious even in early days is a fact beyond question for one who reads Acts 11, 15, 21, to cite nothing else. They could not but feel that the doctrine of the apostle had a depth, and height, and comprehensiveness which for those so long swathed in Jewish bands made it a strain to follow him. He was apostle of the uncircumcision, in itself no small trial to ordinary minds of their mould, as we may assuredly conclude even from the apostles Peter and Barnabas, favoured as they had personally been of God toward Gentiles. Therefore does the writer, supposing him to be Paul, approach them with the most consummate delicacy and tact, as his burning love for his brethren—doubly brethren, both after the flesh and now after the Spirit—would dictate. He becomes as a Jew that he might gain the Jews; to them that were under the law as under law, though being himself not under law, that he might gain those under law. The omission of his name had thus at the starting-point a special propriety in his case beyond that of any other man.

Another ground for its omission is plain from the unusual task before him. The force of the appeal lay in its coming from the first and throughout with the authority of God ; and to Jewish Christians this could be effected in no way so telling as that here employed. " In many measures and in many manners God, having spoken of old to the fathers in the prophets, spoke to us in a [or, the] Son whom He constituted heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds " (Heb. 1: 1, 2). How enfeebling would have been the apostle's introduction of himself in such a connection! Even we who were of the Gentiles, and who are of the church, would feel it in either way out of place, aesthetically in the one instance, spiritually in the other. For the Hebrew Christian no method so impressive, welcome, and authoritative. It was the true end of controversy. Impossible to evade or to gainsay that which carried in itself the evidence of God's mind revealed in His word—at least to a believer.

Hence all flows on the ground of what is confessedly divine ; and any living man's authority, however truly conferred of God and admitted by believers, would be felt rather to interfere than to be seasonable. Therefore we hear in chapter 2 of the word which, having had its commencement in being spoken " by the Lord," was confirmed to us by those that heard, even thus God also bearing witness both by signs and wonders, and manifold powers and distributions of the Holy Ghost according to His own will. In like beautiful

accordance Jesus is shown in chap. 3 to be the Apostle as well as High Priest of our confession. Clearly therefore it is superficial in the extreme to reason on 2: 3, 4, as evidence against Paul's authorship. Those who were designated apostles by the Lord on earth are merely "those that heard"; and as Saul then was but an unbeliever of Israel like the mass, he graciously sinks himself among the rest as "to us." Just thus, long after he was an apostle by call, he could say on meet occasion, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia," and even "I am a Pharisee, son of Pharisees," and "according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee." It would have been self-importance, not gracious wisdom, to have asserted his apostleship in this place, writing as he was by the will and inspiration of God, but evidently outside his special field of the nations, as laid down in Gal. 2: 7-9 and elsewhere. It was a final warning to the Christian Jews; and who so fitted in love no less than in everything else as one who had ere this testified to the Roman Christians that he loved the ancient people as much as Moses, when he asked Jehovah to blot him out of His book if He would not forgive their sin? As the apostle of the circumcision had been employed, and not Paul, to open the kingdom of heaven to the Gentiles (Acts 10), so did the only wise God use the apostle of the uncircumcision, and not Peter, to summon for the last time the Hebrew Christians, whose attachment to the old and earthly system He had so long borne with, but would not any more.

No doubt there were not a few who had learnt better than the amalgam which had hitherto prevailed in Jerusalem among the baptised. But the time was come, and the most suited instrument ever raised up on earth, to bring to a close a state of things abnormal to the spiritual eye, and dangerous for the carnal: who, even if they love the Lord at bottom, are apt to fluctuate and more prone to palliate and foster natural and educational inclinations than to judge them by the word. Jerusalem was about to pass visibly away with the temple, ritual, and priesthood. It was of moment that, before the external blow of judgment fell, the faithful in Palestine should learn what they had been too slow to apprehend. Jesus is not only the Saviour and the Lord, but the great High Priest Who has passed through the heavens, and to this end both Son of God in the supreme sense, owned as God and as Jehovah by Him Who is God and Jehovah, and thus as both divine and human in one person seated at God's right hand on His throne where no creature ever did or can sit.

Hence the Epistle starts with Christ in that glorious condition; and we know who it was that saw this great sight to his conversion from, Judaism as well as sin—who it is that above every other even of inspired men was given to seize and preach and write down permanently the great truth of a Christ known no longer after the flesh, but dead, risen and exalted in heaven; who accordingly writes death on all that flesh and even religious flesh gloried in, that he and we

might find life, righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and redemption, in a word all we and all that God wills us to possess in Christ at His right hand. We are thus heavenly, as is the Heavenly ; and have the assurance of safe keeping and ultimate triumph over every foe ; for as we have borne the image of the earthly (Adam's), we shall also bear the image of the Heavenly (Christ's).

This was the apostle's great ministry of the church, and thus he was enabled by the Holy Spirit to fill up the word of God, even that blank which was left for the revelation of the mystery that had been hid from all ages and generations. Here it is circumscribed, no doubt, as was necessary because of the infantine state of the believing Jews, who little suspected that their adhesion to the old things, and mingling them with the new, hindered progress more than aught else could. Hence the aim of the Epistle is to show the substance, force, and perfection of all the ancient forms in the truth of Christ's person and office, work and position, thus raising the Jews who believed to heaven in faith, affection, worship, service, and hope, and making it easy and even happy for them to see the old covenant passing away, the Aaronic priesthood giving place to a better, and earthly sacrifices of no account, yea of exceeding peril if they became rivals of that finished work by which the faithful have been and are sanctified, and perfected in perpetuity, as surely as Christ sat down in perpetuity at God's right hand.

Thus again " the camp," once the place so favoured of God's people, is a place for the Christian Jew to leave. For the blood of atonement has been carried into the holiest for us, and He Who shed it suffered " without the gate." Our place therefore is now within the holiest before God, and without the camp before man ; for it is effectively and ought to be only with Christ in both. " Having therefore, brethren, boldness for the entering into the holies by the blood of Jesus, a new and living way, which he inaugurated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh ; and having a great priest over the house of God ; let us approach with true heart in full assurance of faith, sprinkled as to our hearts from an evil conscience, and washed as to our body with pure water " (Heb. x. 19-22). But let us not forget the other side and present duty : " Let us go forth unto him without the camp hearing his reproach ; for here we have not an abiding city, but we seek after the coming one " (Heb. xiii. 13, 14).

It is impossible to conceive anything equal to this Epistle, whether in the most winning approach to the Jewish Christians where they were, or in the no less admirable deliverance from the ritual yoke, by the proof from God's word that Christianity alone yields the true and intended and complete meaning of all they had been well-nigh idolising in the letter.

It ought not to surprise any that scripture has settled the authorship of the Epistle; and this not by men reasoning on the reference to imprisonment and release in Italy, and the relationship to Timothy, but by a sufficiently determinate statement of Peter in his Second Epistle, addressed as we know it is to the elect Jews of the dispersion (cf. 1 Peter 1: 1, 2 ; and 2 Peter 3: 1), as the Epistle to the Hebrews contemplates those in the land. In either case believing Jews are contemplated. What then can be plainer than the apostle Peter's word ? "Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you ; as also in all epistles speaking in them of these things " (2 Peter 3: 15, 16). Now this Epistle repeatedly speaks of the day of the Lord, with some things as usual hard, especially for Jewish minds, to understand, as in chapters 9, 10, and 12. Thus it is certain that Paul as well as Peter wrote to the Hebrew Christians ; and that these are spoken of as " scriptures " by implication in the words that follow. Either then the Epistle to the Hebrews is what Paul wrote to them ; or that portion of the " scriptures " is lost. It has been shown already that the scope of truth is eminently that of Paul ; and the peculiarity of his talk to any reflecting mind would readily account for an elaborate handling of types, most desirable for Jews but out of place in his writing to Gentile saints.

The contents and connection of the Epistle are plainly defined, which from its nature is less coloured with personalia than the other letters of the writer. The personal glory of the Lord Jesus is the basis of all, chapter 1: Son of God, chapter 2 Son of man. Thence follows in chapter 3 the superiority of the Apostle and High Priest of the Christian confession to Moses and Aaron. He was the divine Builder of all, Son over God's house, Moses being but a ministering servant, though faithful. And this introduces the wilderness as the scene through which we are tried, with promise of entering into God's rest—glory at Christ's return. Hence not only is God's word needed by us, but a great high priest able to sympathise with our infirmities, as in chapter 4. This leads in chapter 5 to the contrast of Christ's priesthood, God's Son according to the order of Melchizedek, with that of Aaron taken from among men, and able to exercise forbearance toward the ignorant and erring, since he himself was clothed with infirmity, and was bound to offer for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.

But here the apostle turns aside, as his manner is, to lay bare the hindrance through Jewish elements, still pertinaciously clung to, yet incompatible with the everlasting and heavenly things which suit our relation to that great High Priest Who has passed through the heavens and set Himself in a seat so glorious. The word of the beginning of Christ, however good, is quite insufficient ; and the Christian must go on to full growth (chapter 6) ; for as it is expressed elsewhere, we are no longer under law, suited and given as it was to man in flesh, but under

grace, as should be self-evident. How else could *we* be heavenly, as is the Heavenly ? Sovereign grace, reigning through righteousness, alone accounts for it. And hence the danger of going back from the heavenly privileges now revealed to those elements which are nailed to the cross and vanished away to faith in the light of Christ on high : a danger to which none were so exposed as Hebrews. He therefore desires that each might show diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end, having God's oath as well as word with a forerunner in Christ within the veil.

Chapter 7 proves how immeasurably and in all respects the priesthood of Jesus, the Son of God, surpasses that of Aaron bound up as it was with the law which made nothing perfect. The ancient oracles which fully prepare for it intimate also a new and better covenant (chapter 8), before which the first grows old and ready to vanish away, instead of possessing that immutability with which rabbinical pride and imagination clothed it. And this leads to the great truth of sacrifice according to God's mind and will (chapter 9 and 10.), which has found alone its adequate force in the blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself spotless to God. Therefore its unity is insisted on, as its completeness is attested by His sitting in perpetuity on God's right hand, the work finished, and those that are sanctified perfected, not merely for ever but in perpetuity or without break also, by that one offering. Here too the warning of abandoning for sin such a sacrifice is solemnly rendered, while it is allowed that we have need of patience in faith, till Jesus come.

This is followed (chapter 11) by the striking roll of God's worthies, all being testified of for their faith, before the law and during it, culminating in Jesus the Leader and Completer of faith, Who, infinitely above all in person, suffered immeasurably more and differently, and is alone now in commensurate glory at the right hand of the throne of God (chapter 12). And here is beautifully shewn that for believers suffering flows from His love as the Father of our spirits, and not now of a nation. Our standing is in His grace, not the law of Sinai ; and we are come in faith to the glorious results anticipated for heaven and earth, as the kingdom will display when at His appearing He will cause not the earth only but the heaven to tremble and shake.

Brotherly love, hospitality, and compassion are urged, with the sanctity of marriage, and freedom from avarice through trust in the Lord (chap. xiii.). Departed leaders are to be remembered, as living ones to be obeyed. Jesus abides the same. Serving the tabernacle has no more value : all is found in Him, His work, and His offices. " Let us therefore go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach." Such is Christianity as here shown from divinely handled Jewish types and Old Testament teaching. Prayer for the writer and

those with him is asked, as he beseeches of the Lord peace for them, saluting all their leaders and all the saints.

Characteristics of the Letter or Book of Hebrews

Authorship

The King James Version of the Bible usually places a heading over Hebrews with the words, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews." Unfortunately (perhaps) those clear words were not part of the original document of Hebrews, but were added several hundred years later by scribes copying the book who believed Paul to be the author. Unlike the thirteen letters of Paul there is no mention of the author by name in Hebrews. In fact, every book normally thought of as a letter in the New Testament begins with the author's name as the first word except Hebrews and 1 John.

Uncertainty about the author of Hebrews goes back to the earliest references to the book. By the early A.D. 200's church fathers in Alexandria, Egypt, were describing Paul as the author. However, they recognized that the Greek style of the book was very different from the style of Paul. Some thought that Paul had written the book in Hebrew and Luke had translated it into Greek. The great scholar Origen knew that Paul was not the author, but supposed that a student of Paul had written Paul's thoughts in his own style and words. He mentioned that others in the church believed the author of Hebrews to have been either Clement of Roman (who wrote a letter to Corinth about A.D. 95) or Luke, the author of Luke and Acts. Other ancient writers suggested Barnabas as a possible author of Hebrews.

It was not until about A.D. 400 that the idea of Pauline authorship of Hebrews became widespread in the church. However, that opinion was never completely accepted. Throughout the history of the church analytical Bible scholars who knew the uncertain tradition of Pauline authorship offered their opinions about the identity of the author. Calvin repeated the ancient view that Luke or Clement were the most likely authors. In the 1500's Martin Luther, founder of the Protestant Reformation, suggested that Apollos was the most likely author among those persons mentioned in the New Testament. Apollos has remained a popular candidate through the last four centuries. Priscilla and Aquila, Silas, Jude, Aristion, Phillip, and even the Virgin Mary are other Biblical persons who have been mentioned as a possible author of Hebrews.

The case for Pauline authorship in the early church rested on the reference to Timothy - well known as an associate of Paul - in Hebrews 13:23 and the

general similarity of the theology of Hebrews to orthodox Christianity (supposedly developed by Paul). However, there are a number of details that speak against the assumption that Paul wrote Hebrews. The author of Hebrews was much more trained and skilled in the use of the Greek language than was Paul. Some of the most sophisticated Greek to be found in the New Testament is in the book of Hebrews. The only book that matches the powerful Greek style in the New Testament is Luke and Acts - thus the idea by both early and modern Christians that Luke might have been the author.

The flow of thought and the logic of the argument of Hebrews is very different from anything we encounter in the known letters of Paul. The way in which the Old Testament is quoted and used by the author of Hebrews is very different from the way Paul appealed to the Jewish Scriptures. The author describes himself (or herself) in Hebrews 2:3 as a step removed from the original apostles. Galatians 1:12 and 1 Corinthians 9:1 show that Paul expressed his awareness of the historical life of Jesus in very different terms. There are virtually no reputable scholars today who would argue that Paul wrote the book of Hebrews. The bottom line of the discussion of the authorship of Hebrews is that we do not know the author's name. There is still no better conclusion than that drawn by Origen near A.D. 200 when he wrote, "As to who actually wrote the epistle, God only knows." Attempts to give the author a name are fruitless.

However, that does not mean that we know nothing about the author. We know a great deal about him (or her), we just don't know his (or her) name. The author was a Jew who was born and educated in the Greek-speaking world. He had a broad vocabulary and powerful training in logic and rhetoric. It is likely that he attended the finest schools available in the first century. He had an architectural mind that was capable of ordering numerous details to produce a well-structured argument. He was a deeply spiritual person whose commitment to Christ called forth all his "being's ransomed powers" in service to the church. He has also been described as a pastoral theologian. This author shaped the common Christian teaching by the genius of his own training to meet the needs of a group of people who desperately needed a message from God.

Audience

Not only does Hebrews not mention the author, it does not contain the traditional mention of the addressees. The traditional title and superscript to the book *To the Hebrews* was not part of the original text of the book and it appears to represent an early (and insightful) guess as to the audience. It is almost universally accepted that the original audience was a group of Jewish Christians. There have been scholars in the twentieth century who advanced arguments in

favor of a Gentile audience, but these scholars are appropriately in the small minority. It is not likely at all that the book of Hebrews would have been written as it was if the original audience had been Gentiles. Modern gentile Christians who have a long heritage of Christianity have a difficult time understanding Hebrews.

The original readers were Jewish in their background. It is equally clear that they were part of what is called Hellenistic Judaism. That means they were Jews who were born and bred with Greek as their native language and the Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint) as their version of the Bible. These Hellenistic Jews did not live in Palestine, but in one of the great metropolitan cities of the Mediterranean world. After the Babylonian captivity described at the end of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, not all the exiles returned to Jerusalem and Palestine. In the five hundred years from the end of the Babylonian Exile until the time of Christ, the descendants of those Jewish captives spread across the ancient world. They became businessmen and mercenary soldiers and congregated in the great cities. The largest Egyptian city, Alexandria, was thought to have about a quarter of its population to be Jews.

It is not possible to be sure in which large city of the ancient Mediterranean world the original audience of Hebrews lived. Hebrews 13:24 sends greetings to the readers of the book from "those of Italy." The phrase could be understood in two different ways. It could mean that the author was in Italy, writing to people in a city outside Italy, sending greetings from all the Italian people around him. Or it could be that the audience was in Italy (Rome would be the great metropolitan city), the author was outside Italy, but all his Italian (Roman) friends wanted to send greetings to their friends back home in Rome.

For several reasons this second view is more likely. The first writer of the early Christian fathers to quote Hebrews was Clement of Rome. The circumstances reflected in Hebrews can best be found in Rome in the middle of the decade of the A.D. 60's. Hebrews implies that the first readers of the book were Jewish Christians, but not the only Christians in their city. Other New Testament writings (especially Romans) suggest that the church at Rome was composed of several congregations or "house-churches," one of which was a congregation of Jewish believers. The question of the identity of the original audience is closely connected to the question of the date and the purpose of Hebrews.

Date

Since Clement of Rome quoted the book of Hebrews in a letter which he wrote in approximately A.D. 95, Hebrews must be earlier than that. Since Hebrews 13:23 mentions Timothy's release from prison, the book would have

been written after A.D. 50 when Paul summoned the then-young Timothy into travelling Christian service.

Hebrews 12:4 states that the readers had not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood. This suggests that the community was facing some kind of persecution. Other passages in Hebrews are consistent with the view that the readers were either being persecuted or being threatened by the possibility of persecution soon. Hebrews 10:32-34 indicates that the community had suffered persecution in an earlier period. It is possible that either or both of the times of persecution mentioned in Hebrews were minor events that are not known in the larger flow of history.

However, most scholars attempt to date Hebrews by connecting these two persecutions to times in which the church at Rome was known to have been persecuted. The first persecution was in A.D. 49 when the emperor Claudius evicted all the Jews (believers and those who did not accept Christ as the Messiah) out of Rome apparently because of disruptive arguments over the Messiah. It was because of this persecution that Aquila and Priscilla came to Corinth, according to Acts 18: 1-2. Several years later Claudius relaxed the eviction edict and Jews (both Christians and those who rejected Christ) began to return to Rome. (Many Bible scholars now believe that Romans was written to counter problems in the church that arose when the evicted Jewish Christians returned to Rome to discover that leadership in the church had been taken over by Gentile believers.)

The best known period of persecution of the church by the Romans was around A.D. 65 near the end of the reign of Nero. The great fire had destroyed much of Rome in A.D. 64. Nero was a prime suspect and apparently to deflect suspicion and hatred from himself, he publicly blamed the Christians for the fire. From then until his death in A.D. 68 Nero was involved in periodic persecution and/or harassment of the church.

The next major outbreak of persecution in Rome occurred in the reign of the emperor Domitian between A.D. 81 and 96. Though some scholars argue that the earlier persecutions of Hebrews 10:32-34 took place under Nero and the book was written during the persecution of Domitian, that view has not won general acceptance. The majority of scholars believe that Hebrews 10:32-34 refers either to a period just a few years earlier but still in the Neronian period or to the persecution connected with the eviction edict of Claudius. In either case, the book of Hebrews is thought to have been written during the Neronian persecutions sometime between A.D. 64 and A.D. 68.

The other issue that enters into the question of the date has to do with whether or not the temple of Jerusalem was still standing when Hebrews was written. The temple of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman armies in A.D. 70. It was such a traumatic event in Jewish history that it is hard to imagine a Jewish

author writing after the event and making no reference to it. The book of Hebrews does not refer to the temple at all. The most typical conclusion drawn from that fact is that the book was written before A.D. 70. This point of view is underscored by the argument of Hebrews. Repeatedly the author shows how Christ has superseded the persons and institutions of Judaism. Surely he would have argued that Christ was a better temple if he had known that the Jewish temple lay in ruins. The suggestion that Hebrews was prior to A.D. 70 fits in well with a situation during the persecution of Nero in A.D. 65.

The book of Hebrews was probably written to Jewish Christians in Rome who were facing persecution under Nero. Judaism was a legal and recognized religion at that time. Jews who did not believe in Christ were not in danger of persecution from Nero at that time. Christians were in that danger. It would have been a very tempting thought to Jewish Christians who were being persecuted to down play their commitment to Christ. If they would deny their faith in Christ and present themselves only as Jews (and not as Jewish Christians) they would be safe from the persecution. Then, perhaps at a later and safer date, they could pick up their commitment to Christ again. Hebrews makes best sense as an argument to prevent the first readers from being enticed into following such a tempting course of action.

Literary Form

Hebrews has traditionally been described as an epistle or letter. It appears in the New Testament in the middle of the collection of letters. It functions as a hinge connecting the 13 Pauline letters and the 7 general or Catholic epistles. However, Hebrews lacks the basic ingredients that identified ancient letters. There is no mention of author, no mention of addressees, no greeting, no thanksgiving section and no prayer for the readers in the opening lines. The closing verses of Hebrews 13 do reflect the traditional way in which a letter should close.

If Hebrews was not a letter, what was it? Various kinds of spoken and written discourses have been suggested. But the most common (and most likely) suggestion has been that Hebrews follows the form of a sermon or homily developed for the Hellenistic Jewish synagogues. The writer describes his work in Hebrews 13:22 as a "word of exhortation." The exact same phrase was used in Acts 13:15 to describe Paul's sermon to the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia. Though some scholars argue that we do not know the exact structure of Hellenistic Jewish sermons, the book of Hebrews fits all the criteria that are commonly suggested. It is most likely, then, that the original literary form of the book was a sermon or homily.

This is an important conclusion. It means that the author of Hebrews believed that his interpretation of the Scripture would produce a message that could be

especially helpful to those readers needing to persevere under the pressure of persecution. It means that the book was not for the purpose of speculative theology, but was a practical approach to a serious problem. People who were facing persecution, perhaps death, for their faith needed encouragement and reinforcement of their faith.

Modern Christian readers differ from the first readers in a couple of ways. First, most modern readers are not Jewish in background. This means that the constant references and allusions to the Old Testament are not always understood. Second, most modern Christians are not facing the same kind of persecution as the first readers of Hebrews faced. Though in some parts of the world the threat of death because of one's Christian faith is very real, most Western Christians face temptation and pressure to return to the secular world rather than to a previous religious haven like Judaism. The sermon that is the book of Hebrews urged the first readers to stay true to Christ and not return to Judaism. Part of the power of the sermon is that it still speaks words of encouragement. The message of Hebrews is still a call to persevere under pressure. That message is just as pertinent today as it ever was.

The Role of the Old Testament

It does not take long before one discovers that the Old Testament plays an extremely significant role in Hebrews. A major part of the technical analysis of Hebrews is now devoted to the way in which the author made use of the Old Testament. Every chapter of Hebrews makes either a direct quotation from the Old Testament or refers to an Old Testament person or concept that the author assumes the reader will immediately recognize.

Part of the difficulty for modern Christians in understanding Hebrews is the lack of an adequate Old Testament background to recognize the way it constantly shapes the author's argument. Scholars are beginning to recognize that the very outline of Hebrews is built around quotations from the Old Testament. Quotations from Psalms 8, 95, 110, Jeremiah 31, Habakkuk 2, and Proverbs 3 form the anchor points for the major sections of the book of Hebrews.

The author used a variety of techniques for interpreting the Old Testament passages that were so influential in his book. Several Jewish techniques of exegesis appear on the pages of Hebrews. This is part of the evidence that the author is a highly trained scholar. Like most New Testament writers, however, the author will frequently "see" Jesus in an Old Testament passage. When that happens the author immediately interprets the passage in light of the purpose of God to reveal Christ. It is an important model for us to be aware of when we attempt to interpret the Old Testament.

The Message of Hebrews

The message of Hebrews can be summed up in three words, "**Christ is better.**" The book seems to un-fold the message in a crescendo of arguments. Christ is better than the angels who revealed the first covenant (Hebrews 1:1-2:18). Christ is better than Moses who was the mediator of the first covenant (Hebrews 3:1-19). Christ was better than Joshua (Hebrews 4:1-13).

But the heart of the argument comes in Hebrews 4:14-10:18. There the language of the priesthood, altar, and sacrifice comes to the forefront. Christ is a better priest than the Aaronic priests of Judaism. Christ offers a better sacrifice. He is a better tabernacle. He is a better altar. His priestly work is superior to that of the Old Testament. One is left with the conclusion that a decision to abandon faith in Christ and to return to Judaism would be the worst mistake a person could make. This was obviously the conclusion the author of Hebrews hoped his readers would draw.

Exhortation is another common element in the message of Hebrews. Exhortations not to slip or not to neglect the superiority of Christ appear regularly in the opening nine chapters. However, it is in the final four chapters that exhortation becomes the dominant motif. The great faith chapter in Hebrews 11 lists numerous examples of Jewish heroes who had looked forward to their Messiah. The author reacts in horror to the idea that their descendants would turn their backs on the long-hoped-for Messiah to return to the security the heroes had hoped to escape.

Another theme that moves through the book of Hebrews is the concept of a pilgrim people. Recent scholars have emphasized the fact that Hebrews understands both the Old Testament community of Israel and the new community of the church as people on the journey of faith. The model of Israel in the Old Testament is foundational. Israel was on a two-fold journey. The first and most obvious journey was the journey out of Egypt and into the promised land. The climax of that journey was the conquest of the land under Joshua. However, there was a second pilgrimage for Israel and that was the journey through history toward the coming of the Messiah.

The pilgrimage motif offers the author of Hebrews several exciting possibilities for spiritual instruction. He is able to challenge them to understand their own spiritual experiences in terms of a journey. This provides a way of explaining the persecution. There are always difficult times as well as the easier times on a journey. The persecution that they were experiencing represented the difficult portions of a pilgrimage. Even if the pressure the readers were feeling was guilt rather than persecution (as Barnabas Lindars argues), the pilgrimage motif holds.

However, in a true pilgrimage (as opposed to just a trip) the goal is the most important thing. Here, the author is able to play the second pilgrimage, the journey through history toward the coming of the Messiah, against the present experiences of his readers. Just as old Israel continued on through thick and thin hoping for the Messiah, the readers of Hebrews must press on, persevering under pressure because Messiah has already come. The final perfection of heaven must become their goal. They have many more resources for their journey than old Israel had.

It is the coming together of these three themes that gives the book of Hebrews its great strength and ability to be used throughout the history of the church. The modern world in which we live is very capable of understanding life as a journey. We understand a little bit of the sweep of history and the idea of progress always influences the way we think. We are aware that those who have gone before us overcame tremendous obstacles.

But the obstacles we face intimidate us. We are overwhelmed by uncertainty. The journey was easy enough long enough that we don't know how to handle the pressures and choices that lie in front of us on the journey. Our generation especially needs to hear the basic message of Hebrews again. We need a word of exhortation, a word of encouragement, even a word of prodding that tells us to keep on the journey. We need constant reminders of the superiority of Christ. Few of us are tempted to turn back to Old Testament style Judaism. We are tempted to combine Christ with a system of psychology or a theory of economics. We are tempted to believe that faith is easy when life is easy and faith is hard when life is hard. We need to be reminded that life is a journey toward the final goal of heavenly and perfect relationship with God in Christ. We need to be reminded that no price is too expensive to pay; no effort is too much to give in order to gain the final goal.

Outline of the Letter or Book to the Hebrews

Part 1: God has spoken to us by His Superior Spokesman-- Christ His Son, Hebrews 1:1-4:13

- A. A word of instruction about God's superior spokesman, Hebrews 1:1-3
 - 1. Christ his Son is superior to the prophets, Hebrews 1:1-3
 - a. In the past God spoke to us Jews by the prophets many times in various ways, Hebrews 1:1
 - b. More recently in these last days God has spoken to us Jews by Christ his Son, 1:2,3
 - b.1 Who is the heir of all things, Hebrews 1:2

b.2 Who is the Creator of the universe, Hebrews 1:2

b.3 Who is very God of very God, being the very glory and essence of God, Hebrews 1:3

b.4 Who sustains all of God's creation by his powerful word, Hebrews 1:3

b.5 Who purified us from our sins, Hebrews 1:3

b.6 Who now sits at the right hand of God in heaven, Hebrews 1:3

B. A word of instruction about Christ, God's Son, who is superior to the angels, Hebrews 1:4-14

1. Christ is superior to the angels as his name the Son of God is superior to their name angels, Hebrews 1:4

a. God called Christ his Son in the Old Testament Scriptures, Hebrews 1:5

a.1 Whereas God called on his angels to worship Christ his begotten Son, Hebrews 1:6

a.2 Whereas God called his angels winds and servants of fire, Hebrews 1:7

b. But God called Christ by the name of God, who reigns in righteousness and is set over us believers, Hebrews 1:8,9

2. Christ is superior to the angels in his attributes and works, Hebrews 1:10-14

a. He is the eternal, unchanging Lord, who was in the beginning of creation and will remain after the end of the creation, Hebrews 1:10-12

b. He is the Lord himself, who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth and who in the end will destroy them all, Hebrews 1:10-12

c. Whereas God said to no angel to sit at his right hand in the position of authority over the heavens and the earth, for his angels are but ministering spirits to serve us believers who will inherit salvation, Hebrews 1:13,14

3. A word of exhortation to heed the Word that Christ, God's Son, who is superior to the angels, has spoken, Hebrews 2:1-4

a. Since God has spoken to us Jews by Christ his Son, who is superior to the angels, we must pay more careful attention to his Word that we have heard, Hebrews 2:1

b. We must pay such careful attention to the Word of Christ, God's Son,

b.1 Because if God's Word that was spoken by angels was binding and every violation of that Word was justly punished, we can never hope to escape the punishment for ignoring the salvation that was first spoken by the Lord Christ and was then confirmed to us by his apostles, Hebrews 2:2,3

b.2 Because God himself bore witness to this Word of salvation by means of signs, miracles, and gifts of the Spirit, Hebrews 2:4

C. A word of instruction that Christ, God's Son, is superior to the angels, though for a time he was made lower than the angels as our faithful high priest but has since then been exalted to have all things subjected to him, Hebrews 2:5-18

1. God did not subject to angels the world to come, Hebrews 2:5
2. But as the inspired writer of Psalm 8 stated, God did crown with glory and subject all things to Christ, who according to his human nature was made lower than the angels while he was on earth, Hebrews 2:6-8
 - a. Jesus Christ has been crowned with glory because by God's grace he died for everyone, Hebrews 2:9
 - b. In bringing many to glory it was fitting according to God's plan to perfect Jesus, the author of mankind's salvation, through suffering, for which reason we are members of God's family with Jesus and his brothers, Hebrews 2:10-13
 - c. Since the children of God whom Christ came to save are flesh and blood, he was made lower than the angels when he was also made flesh and blood to destroy the devil and the fear of death by his death, Hebrews 2:14,15
 - c.1 He certainly did not come to save the fallen angels but the human descendants of Abraham, the forefather of us Jews, Hebrews 2:16
 - c.2 For this reason he was made like his brothers, the children of God, in every way to serve as their high priest who made the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the people, Hebrews 2:17
 - c.3 Because he himself suffered as the Great High Priest, he is able to help those who are being tempted, Hebrews 2:18
3. A word of exhortation to fix your thoughts, O Jewish Christians, on Jesus whom we confess.

D. A word of instruction about Christ, God's Son, who is superior to Moses, Hebrews 3:2-6

1. Christ, God's Son, was faithful to God as Moses was faithful in all of God's house, Hebrews 3:2
2. But Christ is worthy of greater honor than Moses. For Moses was a faithful servant in God's house, but Christ is the builder of God's house and the faithful Son over God's house, Hebrews 3:3-6

E. A word of exhortation to believe in Christ, God's Son, Hebrews 3:7-4:13

1. As the Holy Spirit says in Psalm 95, if you Jewish Christians hear the voice of God in his Word today, believe it. Don't harden your hearts in unbelief like your Israelite forefathers in the wilderness did and forfeited entering into God's eternal rest, Hebrews 3:7-11

2. Take care that none of you Jewish Christians come to have an unbelieving heart that causes you to fall away from the living God, Hebrews 3:12

3. Encourage one another in the faith daily, while God is giving you the day to believe, so that none of you Jewish Christians become hardened in unbelief by sin, Hebrews 3:13

4. We are partakers in Christ, if we hold fast our faith in him to the end while we have the opportunity now to hear God's voice calling us, Hebrews 3:14,15

5. Remember, O Jewish Christians, your Israelite forefathers in the wilderness, who heard and rebelled and lost their chance to enter God's eternal rest because of their unbelief, Hebrews 3:16-19

6. Since the promise of God to enter his rest in heaven still stands, be careful that none of you Jewish Christians lose it. Like your Israelite forefathers in the wilderness, we also have had the gospel of salvation in Christ preached to us. Through faith in that gospel we enter God's eternal rest, which was prepared at the creation of the world, Hebrews 4:1-5

7. Some will enter God's rest at the present time through faith, which time God calls "Today". Since there is a Sabbath-rest for the people of God, make every effort to enter it so no one will fall by unbelief as your Israelite forefathers in the wilderness did, Hebrews 4:6-11

8. For the Word of God is living and active, a judge of the heart's thoughts and intentions. Nothing is hidden from the sight of God, by whom we will be judged, Hebrews 4:12,13

Part 2: Christ, God's Son, is the Superior High Priest, Hebrews 4:14-10-18

A. Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the Great High Priest, Hebrews 4:14-16

1. A word of exhortation for you Jewish Christians who are considering to return to Judaism with its high priesthood: Hold firmly to our faith in Jesus, Hebrews 4:14

a. For we Christians have the one Great High Priest, Jesus, God's Son, who ascended into heaven to intercede for us with God there, Hebrews 4:14

b. For we Christians have the one Great High Priest, who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, because he himself was tempted in every way we are yet he did not sin, Hebrews 4:15

c. Therefore, approach God's throne of grace through Jesus, the Great High Priest, with the confidence that we will receive mercy and grace in our time of need, Hebrews 4:16

2. A word of instruction about how Jesus, God's Son, obtained his position as the Great High Priest, Hebrews 5:1-10

a. Every high priest is appointed from among men to carry out the duties of his office and does not take that honor upon himself, Hebrews 5:1-4

b. Christ Jesus did not take the glory of being the one Great High Priest upon himself either. God conferred this office to him when God said Christ was his Son and a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek, Hebrews 5:5,6

c. Christ Jesus, our Great High Priest, though God's Son was the one himself who suffered death as the sacrifice for sin. He was perfect and is the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, Hebrews 5:7-9

d. Christ Jesus was designated by God to be the Great High Priest in the order of Melchizedek, Hebrews 5:10

3. A word of exhortation for you Jewish Christians to grow up spiritually, Hebrews 5:11-6:20

a. I the writer of this letter and my co-workers have so much more we could explain to you Jewish Christians about Christ the Great High Priest, but explaining it is difficult because spiritually you are infants, dull of hearing and slow to learn. You are able to digest only the simplest milk about Christ rather than the solid food of God's Word that would train you to distinguish between what is right and wrong, Hebrews 5:11-14

b. So let's leave the basic teachings about Christ, the ABC's of Christianity, to press ahead to a spiritual maturity, rather than relaying the foundational teachings all over again about repentance, faith, baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and the eternal judgment, Hebrews 6:1-3

c. Be aware that there have been some of your Jewish Christians who had partaken of all the blessings that come through faith in Jesus Christ, but who then fell away. They repudiated Christ, and while they do so it is impossible for them to be brought back to repentance. They are worthless weeds who are fit for the fires of hell, Hebrews 6:4-8

d. Though we write sternly about those who have repudiated Christ, we here are confident of better things concerning you Jewish Christians and your salvation. We desire you to be diligent in your work and love for God to make your hope of salvation sure. Accordingly, imitate those who through faith and patience under trial inherit what has been promised, Hebrews 6:9-12

e. Based on the promise and oath of God, such as God made to Abraham your forefather, we have the sure hope of what has been promised. This hope is the anchor of our soul that enters God's Most Holy Place, where Jesus himself entered as our Great High Priest forever in the order of Melchizedek, Hebrews 6:13-20

4. A word of instruction about Christ's superior high priesthood which is in the order of Melchizedek, Hebrews 7:1-28

a. Melchizedek was both a priest and a king. Like the Son of God he remains a priest forever, Hebrews 7:1-3

b. Melchizedek was greater than Abraham and Levi, from whom the Levitical priesthood descended, Hebrews 7:4-10

c. The Lord Jesus Christ, who descended not from the tribe of Levi but the non-priestly tribe of Judah, is a superior high priest in the order of Melchizedek. He is not of the imperfect Levitical priesthood in the order of Aaron, Hebrews 7:11-14

d. The Lord Jesus Christ's high priesthood superseded the old Levitical priesthood on the basis of his indestructible life, not on the basis that he descended from the tribe of Levi, Hebrews 7:15-17

e. The former regulation of the law pertaining to the Levitical priesthood, which was weak and imperfect, was set aside by God's oath that made Christ a priest forever, Hebrews 7:18-22

f. Unlike the Levitical priests whose service was only temporary because they died, Jesus has a permanent priesthood because he lives forever. He is able to save us because he always lives to intercede for us, Hebrews 7:23-25

g. Jesus is the high priest who meets our need, not the high priests of the Levitical priesthood. Jesus, being holy and without sin, made the one sacrifice needed for the sins of the people when he offered up himself to God, Hebrews 7:26-28

5. A word of instruction about Christ's being a superior priest in a superior sanctuary and of a superior covenant, Hebrews 8:1-13

a. Christ Jesus serves as high priest in the heavenly sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by God, not in an earthly sanctuary made by men, Hebrews 8:1-5

b. Christ Jesus is the high priest of the new, superior covenant of God's grace that forgives sins, which superseded the old covenant of the law given on Mount Sinai, Hebrews 8:6-13

6. A word of instruction about Christ who made the superior sacrifice for sins, Hebrews 9:1-10:18

a. In the earthly tabernacle the high priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year with blood to make an imperfect sacrifice for sins that did not open the way to God or clear the worshipper's conscience of guilt, Hebrews 9:1-10

b. Christ, however, as the Great High Priest entered once for all God's heavenly tabernacle by means of his own blood that obtained eternal redemption and cleanses the conscience of sin, Hebrews 9:11-14

c. For this reason Christ is the mediator of the new, superior covenant of eternal salvation that he put into effect by the shedding of his blood, Hebrews 9:15-22

d. Christ as the true high priest entered into heaven and the presence of God, to whom he offered himself once as the bearer of sins to bring salvation upon his return to those who are waiting for him, Hebrews 9:23-28

e. The endless animal sacrifices made according to the law could never take away sins. When Christ came, he set aside those worthless sacrifices by doing the will of God in sacrificing himself once for all. After he as the Great High Priest had offered up himself for all time as the one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, because his one sacrifice made perfect forever those who are being made holy, Hebrews 10:1-15

f. The Holy Spirit also testifies to the one perfect sacrifice for sins that Christ made. In Jeremiah 31 the Spirit testified to the new covenant of forgiveness. Where sins have already been forgiven, there is no further need of sacrifices for sin, Hebrews 10:15-18

Part 3: Words of Exhortation, Hebrews 10:19-12:29

A. Since we have the confidence to come into God's presence through the blood of Jesus, our Great High Priest: Hebrews 10:19-21

1. Therefore, O Jewish Christians, draw near to God in full assurance of faith, Hebrews 10:22

2. Therefore, O Jewish Christians, hold unwaveringly to the hope we confess, Hebrews 10:23

3. Therefore, O Jewish Christians, spur one another on in love and good deeds, Hebrews 10:24

4. And don't, O Jewish Christians, give up worshipping together as some of your number have done, but encourage one another in the faith, Hebrews 10:25

B. Beware, O Jewish Christians, of falling away and willfully repudiating Christ the Son of God's redemption. For if you do, you have no sacrifice for your sins but only the terrifying judgment of God to look forward to, Hebrews 10:26-31

C. Remember, O Jewish Christians, the earlier days of your faith, when for your faith and for your fellow Christians who were imprisoned, you suffered severe persecution. Don't throw away now the confidence of your faith, but endure the persecution so you may receive the promised salvation as ones who believe and are saved, Hebrews 10:32-39

D. Remember, O Jewish Christians, the heroes of faith, who lived by faith and not by sight in the face of their severe tests and trials, Hebrews 11:1-40

E. Bearing in mind the examples of all these heroes of faith, run the race of faith yourselves, you Jewish Christians. Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith, who also endured the hostility of sinful men, so you do not grow weary and lose heart, Hebrews 12:1-3

F. In your suffering persecution remember that God exhorts you as sons. Remember that what you suffer is evidence of God's fatherly love to discipline you so you produce a harvest of righteousness. Then strengthen the weak in your midst, Hebrews 12:4-13

G. See to it that you do not miss the grace of God, O Jewish Christians. You have not come to Mount Sinai as your Israelite forefathers did, which was ever so terrifying. Rather, you have come to Mount Zion, which is the heavenly city and church, and to God and to Jesus. So see to it that you do not refuse God who is speaking to you now, lest you become caught in his consuming judgment, Hebrews 12:14-29

Part 4: Practical Words of Exhortation for the Jewish Christians to Love One Another as Brothers, Hebrews 13:1-17

A. Show hospitality to strangers, Hebrews 13:2

B. Love your imprisoned and persecuted fellow Christians, Hebrews 13:3

C. Let love be shown in honouring marriage and keeping yourselves sexually pure, Hebrews 13:4

D. Don't love money, Hebrews 13:5,6

E. Remember in love your former spiritual leaders who spoke the truthful Word of God to you. Do not be carried away by false teachings that tempt you Jewish Christians to return to Judaism with its ceremonial foods and rituals. For we Christians have an altar, the cross, on which Christ suffered outside the city of Jerusalem so we may have the eternal city which is to come, Hebrews 13:7-17

Part 5: Closing Instructions and Greetings To The Jewish Christians, Hebrews 13:18-25

A. Pray for us fellow workers in the gospel, Hebrews 13:18,19

- B. A prayer for the Jewish Christians who received this letter, Hebrews 13:20,21
- C. Heed the word of exhortation in this letter, Hebrews 13:22
- D. The author's intention to visit the Jewish Christians soon with Timothy, Hebrews 13:23
- E. Greeting, Hebrews 13:24
- F. Concluding benediction, Hebrews 13:25

Commentary on the Book of Hebrews



Chapter 1

1:1-3: The Son superior to the prophets

Verse 1: The ministry of the Prophets

In the first verse is compressed admirably the one most vital truth as to the history of man in all past ages; to which Jews would fully agree. God is, without preliminary, presented as having "in many parts and in many ways" spoken "in time past unto the fathers by the prophets." This was certainly revelation, yet gradually added to, and therefore only partial, not in any sense a complete revelation of God. Let us note too that He was not limited as to the ways in which He saw fit to communicate. Israel well knew this, and should have

expected, in the advent of their Messiah, a revelation no less distinctive and worthy of so great a God. But they were determined to circumscribe the action of God by their pre-conceived assumptions, and bind Him by human tradition.

Thus, through the perversity of man's heart, the former partial revelations of God's glory have been used as a basis and excuse for rejecting the full revelation of Himself in Christ Jesus, rather than (as Divinely intended) to prepare hearts for the greater glory of this manifestation. Indeed, the entire value of the Old Testament lies in its anticipation of something infinitely better than could then be brought to man. Nothing but the blindness of wilful unbelief can deny so evident witness.

Assuredly, Israel did look for something, but every prophecy she regarded from a viewpoint of mere self-interest, looking for glory to invest the nation itself, rather than expecting the glory of God to be revealed in a marvellous and blessed manner.

Verses 2-3: The superior ministry of the Son

But verses 2 and 3 proceed immediately to summarize this present-day transcendent manifestation of the glory of God in the Person of His Son. It is not simply that God is seen thus speaking in the words spoken by the Lord Jesus, but that in Him personally God has spoken; for the words are literally, "hath in these last days spoken unto us in Son." This may not be correct English, but exactly expresses the mind of God, which is the important thing. Prophets had but borne audible witness to God's glory: the Son has personally manifested that glory.

But let us examine now the seven-fold description of this glory. First, "Whom He hath appointed Heir of all things." This appointment is consistent with the official capacity of the promised Messiah. The public assuming of such an office is future, of course; but the Old Testament had prophesied of One to occupy this place (Ps. 89:27-29).

This one must of course fulfil every qualification, and (secondly) "by Whom also He made the worlds." He must therefore have creatorial power. The Old Testament too declares this. Psalm 102:25-29 is explicitly said to be the words of God to the Son (Cf. Heb. 1:10).

Thirdly, "Who being the brightness of His glory" involves His Personal revealing of the light of the glory of God. This is not reflection of the light, but "effulgence," - the light itself,-just as the light from the sun reveals the glory of

the sun, which in itself is too bright to behold. Isaiah 9:6 strongly presents in prophecy this glorious representation of the glory of God: "His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Father of Eternity, the Prince of Peace."

This prophecy too intimates the fourth glory declared in Hebrews 1: "the expression of His substance." So fully is this true that He Himself is called "the Mighty God, the Father of Eternity." Certainly none could express the very substance of God save God Himself. Nor is it simply that He expresses the substance of God, but is Himself the expression. He is Himself the perfect imprint of the substance of God. It is therefore impossible to ascribe to Him too high a place.

This too is evident in the fifth glory mentioned: "upholding all things by the word of His power." If He is the original Creator, He must be also the eternal Sustainer of all things. Nothing can subsist except by the Word of His power, which maintains all things in existence. This is indicated remarkably in Isaiah 40, the first part being the witness of John the Baptist to Christ, and verses 9 to 11 declaring His coming: "Behold, the Lord God will come," and the remainder of the chapter occupied with the greatness of this One, Who measures the waters, the heavens, the dust of the earth, and maintains the order of the heavenly orbs, so that "not one faileth." Only blindness could ignore this magnificent prophetic reference to the promised Messiah.

The sixth glory is that acquired in His advent in the world, "having made (by Himself) the purification of sins." The unique greatness of this work, consistent with the greatness of His Person, is here insisted upon. Many are the prophecies of this marvellous sacrifice of Himself, notably Isaiah 53, Psalm 22 and Psalm 69.

Finally, in the seventh place, "sat down on the right hand of the majesty on High." Such exaltation is impossible for any mere creature, but testifies rather to the august dignity of His Person and His work. Psalm 110:1 had prophesied of this in clearest terms: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit on My right hand until I make thine enemies Thy footstool." This is not only the due recompense of His mighty work, but rightful public recognition of the glory of His Person.

1:4-14: The Son superior to the angels in His person and work

Verses 4 – 9: Superior in His person

Verse 4 involves these two aspects of His glory. Having humbled Himself to a place lower than angels, He is now, as Man, exalted by God, "taking a place by so much better than the angels" (New Trans.). Thus His work of self-humiliation has earned Him a place of highest majesty. But this was only consistent with the fact that "He inherits a Name more excellent than they." Because He is the Son of the Father, He is Heir of all things. "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand" (John 3:35).

How fully and wonderfully does this blessed One fulfil every detail of the minute qualifications laid down in the Old Testament. The heart can only marvel at so full a summation of His glories in so brief a compass. How worthy of God, Who, in the revelation of His Son, has revealed His own full identification with His Son.

But a second section in the chapter (beginning with verse 5) now develops further His glory in contrast to angels, noted in verse 4. He must not in any way be confounded with the greatest of created beings, for he is infinitely above them all. Though angels "excel in strength," (Ps. 103:20) they are but creatures, and worshippers, not objects of worship. This section quotes seven times from the Old Testament.

First, "For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee?" The importance of this public announcement at the time of His birth must not be underestimated. False Christ's have arisen, and after foisting themselves upon the public, have dared to claim to have been miraculously born of a virgin: but in no such case would a public announcement have been made at the time of birth. To attempt such an imposture by some such declaration at the time of birth of a child would of course be too hazardous: the child would not likely turn out in the mould desired by its wicked promoters. But Luke 2:5 gives us historically the public announcement of the birth of the Lord Jesus: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord" (vs. 10). This is confirmed also independently by the wise men who had seen His star in the east (Matt. 2:1, 2). Let us weigh well then the force and power of this first quotation.

"And again, I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son." This second quotation (from 2 Sam. 7:14) again presses the relationship of Christ to the Father. This was most needful to be established beyond question. If in the

first case, this is publicly announced, in the second it is the consistent testimony of His entire life on earth. The Father owned Him fully, bearing witness to His words and walk, with signs and wonders, which in not one instance failed Him. He proved to be Son of the Father in practical character, in every detail of life. Twice also from Heaven the Father announced His delight in Him: "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased."

But then is more: "Again, when He bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him" (Psa. 97:7). The Psalm speaks of "the presence of the Lord of the whole earth," therefore the advent of Messiah, and calls upon the highest created intelligences to "worship Him." When thus He "was manifest in flesh, seen of angels," there is no question but what He was rightly the Object of their adoring worship. (Cf. Luke 2:13, 14).

"And of the angels He saith, Who maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire." This fourth quotation insists that angels are simply creatures, made by the hand of God, however awesome their power. Him whom they worship is infinitely greater than they.

The fifth quotation now rises to the blessed climax of the truth concerning this glorious Person: `But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.' It has been evident that all that has gone before must involve the fact that He is God. Hence, this is now asserted in plainest terms, when God addresses the Son as "God," whose throne is for ever and ever. Psalms 45 is quoted, where the King, the Messiah of Israel, is thus addressed by God.

The eternity of His nature assures the eternity of His throne, in contrast to all mere human thrones. In further contrast is His sceptre of righteousness; for history has proven this woefully lacking in every other kingdom.

Yet if verse 8 declares His glory as God, verse 9 no less beautifully indicates His true Humanity. In lowly experience on earth He is proven in perfection to love righteousness and to hate iniquity. This glory in Humanity is also in contrast to all others. Therefore God, His God, has anointed Him with the oil of the Holy Spirit, as above all others with whom He has condescended to link His Name in fellowship. If in grace He has "fellows," yet He is above them. This anointing as One unique and apart from all others is seen when He was baptized by John, and the Spirit, like a dove, abode upon Him. The actual assuming of the throne is still future, of course, but the anointing is already His, as typified in David's

anointing long before he was exalted to the throne of Israel. Yet, at this very occasion (the baptism of John) He linked Himself in grace with repentant Israelites. How beautifully is His solitary glory and dignity maintained while He finds delight in identifying Himself with His "fellows."

Verses 10-14: Superior in His work

Verses 10 to 12 add the sixth quotation (from Psa. 102:25-27). Here His eternal glory is seen in the visible creation, and also in contrast to it. He who is addressed as "God" is now addressed as "Lord," the former denoting His supremacy, the latter His authority. He has founded the earth and formed the heavens, and they therefore declare His glory (Psa. 19:1). But "they shall perish." In their present form He has decreed they shall not continue, and their very destruction serves to emphasize that He is the eternal One: "Thou remainest."

Creation is but as a temporary garment with which He has clothed Himself in partial display of His glory: it will be folded and changed. "But Thou art the Same, and Thy years shall not fail." This grand title of our Lord is often used, and Ch. 13:8 briefly states its eternal significance: "Jesus Christ the Same yesterday, and today, and forever." In eternity past, in present manifestation to faith, in future, visible glory, His very Name is "The Same." His "years shall not fail." The decline of age that so affects creation has no bearing upon His blessed Person. These verses quoted from Psalm 102 are words addressed to Him by God, just as is true in verse 8.

The seventh quotation completes this series: "Sit on My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool." He thus occupies this place of present, highest exaltation, in contrast to angels. This is His position upon the Father's throne, which could be given to no created being, for it is the throne of Deity. In the Millennium He will take His own throne as Son of Man, but prior to this His title to such a throne is abundantly proven by His present exaltation to the highest throne of all. And here in calm patience He waits for the subjugation of His enemies, - not that there is the slightest doubt as to this, for this present throne involves His own sovereign control of all things, His wise and timely disposal of every issue according to Divine counsels. Blessed, holy dignity!

It may be remarked that His literal coming for His saints at the rapture does not in any sense interrupt this session on the Father's right hand, for this exaltation does not mean a confining to a strict location, no more than we should expect a sovereign on the throne to be always literally seated. But He remains infinitely

exalted, although not yet publicly so, as will be the case when all enemies are put under His feet and He sits upon the throne of His glory (Matt. 25:31).

He therefore is in the place of absolute authority, but angels are "all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." Theirs is the place of servants simply, their place infinitely lower than His, just as in person they are as much lower. But it is nevertheless a blessed place they occupy, in being delegated to minister in temporal protection, comfort, sustenance, to those destined to eternal glory. Doubtless we owe to angelic ministry far more than we discern in matters of physical strength and wellbeing, yet as spirit beings their ministry is completely veiled, and they are content to remain unknown to us, that glory for this may be given only to God. Blessed service indeed! Compare their ministry to the Lord Jesus in Mark 1:13, and an angel strengthening Him (physically of course) in Luke 22:43.

Chapter 2

2:1-4 Warning against drifting

Verses 1- 4 : Warning and its reason

The first four verses of this chapter now press upon us the appropriate conclusions that must be drawn from so transcendent a revelation of the glory of God. "For this reason we should give heed more abundantly to the things we have heard, lest in any way we should slip away" (N. Trans.).

The truth has been given by report, and absolutely authenticated by God's authority. How worthy of the complete concentration of our minds and hearts! Is it possible the intelligence can become so deadened as to ignore facts so demonstrated? Yes. Pressure of personal circumstances among Hebrews who had professed Christianity had induced some to renounce what they had at first acknowledged, and to return to the dead forms of Judaism. The seed of the Word of God had sprung up, but without roots, it withered quickly away. These were not born again, as was proven by their "slipping away" from the very profession of Christ. This was not simply conduct unbecoming to a Christian, but turning wilfully away from Christ Himself, in cold unbelief. Similar cases are contemplated in Ch. 6:4-6 and Ch. 10:26-29.

The warning is fearfully solemn: "For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to

be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him?" The law, "ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator," or as Stephen said, "received... by the disposition of angels," demanded sternest measures of judgment for every infraction of it. Jews knew this. But since this was true, and now in these last days God has provided so great a salvation for the guilty, what possible hope can there be of escape, if this great salvation is ignored? How avoid the just retribution of God's anger if this marvellous revelation - infinitely greater than law - should be despised?

Nor was the message communicated by angels, but by the Lord Himself, borne witness to by many who heard Him, and further witnessed by God's accrediting these messengers by granting "both signs and wonders, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will." Here was threefold competent witness; for the character of these "signs, wonders and miracles," was not questionable, as is the case with modern imitations. Indeed so indisputable were the facts that the most bitter enemies of Christ would attempt no denial, though set in opposition to the plainest testimony. Compare Acts 4: 15-18, and 5:16-24. No shadow of doubt was allowed to remain as to God's full approval of the establishment of Christianity publicly. Only unreasoning prejudice on the part of Jews could reject it. How can such folly hope to escape the dire consequences?

As examples of "signs," speaking in tongues is significant of an understanding established between those formerly at odds (e.g. Jews and Gentiles), an understanding found only in the mutual knowledge of Christ; and healings were significant of the more vital healing of the soul by the knowledge of Christ. As to wonders, it is clear from Acts 3:9-11 that a sign may also be a wonder. All three elements (signs, wonders, miracles) may be evident in one case, though some may more emphasize one than another. Signs intimate a spiritual teaching; wonders, the startling effect on man; miracles the fact of natural law being (not suspended, but) transcended by a higher power.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit were remarkably evident in power in the beginning of the book of Acts. The boldness and power of Peter and John in proclaiming the Word of God greatly impressed the Jewish council (Acts 4:13). Compare also Stephen in Ch. 6 and 7, Philip in Ch. 8. These are but samples of the many marked gifts of the Spirit which bore overwhelming testimony to the truths of the doctrine of Christ. Nor was God a respecter of persons, for He thus gifted unlearned men, "according to His own will," and those of every walk of life were chosen, a procedure contrary to that which human energy would have attempted.

2: 5-9: The Son superior to the angels in His authority

Verse 5: The Son's kingdom authority

Verse 5 now introduces a second division of the book, beginning with sound, admirable deductions based upon the truths already asserted, and upon further quotations from the Old Testament.

If angels have been superseded by the witness of the Lord Jesus and of His disciples, was this itself consistent with Old Testament prophecy? The answer is most plain: "Unto the angels hath He not put in subjection the world (or age) to come, whereof we speak." Though angels had a prominent place in the dispensation of law, it was prophesied otherwise as to the coming millennial kingdom, the age to come.

Verses 6-9: The basis of the Son's authority

2: 10-13: The Son superior to the angels in His perfect humanity

Verses 11-13: Union of the redeemer and the redeemed

2:14-18: The Son superior to the angels in His conquest of sin and death

Verses 14-16: The purpose of the incarnation

Verses 17-18: The purpose of His priesthood

Verses 6 to 8 are quoted from Psalm 8: "What is man that Thou art mindful of Him, or the son of man, that Thou visitest Him? Thou madest Him a little lower than the angels; Thou crownest Him with glory and honour, and hast set Him over the works of Thine hands. Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet." No doubt in a prime sense this was true of man as originally created of God. But man had completely forfeited this place even of dominion over the earth, through his miserable disobedience to God; and at the time the Psalm was written, it could have reference to no one but a Man of a different stamp than Adam, One whose perfection could delight the heart of God. Moreover the prophecy states that God has put all things in subjection under His feet,-not only things on earth. Let us remark too that He is referred to, not only as man, but "the Son of Man," which was not true of Adam.

But the Psalmist might well express wonder at the consideration of man's being so exalted, for the form of man's being is decidedly that of weakness and

limitation, in contrast to angels. Verse 7 refers to this, that man has been made a little lower than the angels. And such was the condition in which the blessed Lord of Glory was pleased to tread this earth. Yet now all things are put under His feet, which includes angels too, "for He left nothing that is not put under Him." If we do not as yet see this in public display, it is vitally true, and will yet be displayed in the coming kingdom.

"But we see Jesus." This is faith's language: we see with the eyes of a believing heart,-the Object the Person of the Son of Man at the right hand of God. Since it is truth, then truth in the heart responds to it. He who was made (voluntarily) a little lower than angels, though in nature infinitely higher than they, is now crowned with glory and honour.

But our verse explains the expression "made lower." This was an absolute necessity "for the suffering of death." Angels cannot die, for they are spirits, their form of being therefore higher than that of man. They "excel in strength." Man, by reason of his bodily condition on earth, is characterized by weakness and many limitations, and is capable of dying-nay, subject to death because of his sin. Death being God's sentence against sin, no redemption was possible except as the blessed Son of God in grace became truly "Man," lower than angels, to suffer death for all. Such is the immeasurable grace of God! Rightly therefore, as Man, He is now crowned with glory and honour, exalted above angels. If in Manhood He has become lower than angels, this was but for the suffering of death: now in Him we contemplate Manhood as exalted above angels. It is this Man who will rule over the earth in the age to come.

From verse 12 to 18 this Man's perfection as a Saviour is beautifully shown. For this He must be a sufferer: "For it became Him, for Whom are all things, and by Whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." It was morally consistent with God's nature that, in order to bring many sons to the bliss of His presence, He should lead His own Son through the sufferings and death of the cross, to make Him, in resurrection, the "perfect" originator of salvation. Notice that it is not man's blessing that is most important here, but what is becoming to God, that is, His own glory.

In the performance of this work, the Lord Jesus is seen as sanctifying (or setting apart) every believer to God. But this too involves His own voluntary unity with them: "For both He that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren." They are of one Father, -He by very nature and title, we by His infinite grace. By nature, it is impossible that He should call us brethren, but through virtue of His perfect

salvation, He is not ashamed to do so. But let us repeat, this He does in grace: for us to call Him "Brother" would be unbecoming abuse of grace.

Verse 12 quotes from Psalm 22 words of the Lord Jesus spoken in resurrection: "I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren; in the midst of the assembly will I sing Thy praises" (N. Trans.). How beautifully linked to this is His message to Mary Magdalene, "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father; and to My God, and your God" (John 20:17). He does not say, "Our Father," for there remains an infinite distinction between the Master and His brethren by grace; but there is yet an established and blessed unity. Primarily it is He Himself who sings praises to God, in the vibrant, joyous delight of an accomplished redemption; but it is the sacred privilege of His redeemed to join with Him in this triumphant song.

He Himself is 'in the midst of the assembly,' not simply for our blessing, but for the glory of God. This unfeigned, joyous ascription of praise to God is the prime reason for the gathering of the church, the assembly of the living God. Let us zealously guard against its degeneration into anything less than this. Indeed this spirit of praise should be evident even when gathered for prayer in seeking the gracious blessing of God, or in the ministry of the Word of God to the saints. But the remembrance of the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread,-the central expression of the fellowship of the body of Christ, -is intended exclusively for the bringing of praise, thanksgiving, adoration to our God and Father through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Verse 13 quotes first from 2 Samuel 22:3, to stress the dependence of His perfect Manhood: "I will put My trust in Him." This too is beautifully seen in Psalm 16, which begins, "Preserve Me, O God, for in Thee do I put My trust." As such too, however, His delights are with the sons of men, and it is His joy to say, as in Isaiah 8:18, "Behold I, and the children which God hath given Me." Let us observe again that His own unique distinction is first noted, and this enhances the wonder and beauty of His grace in so uniting with His saints. He receives these children as a gift from God. It may be remarked that a similar expression is used when, speaking as the Divine Son of God, He says, "I have manifested Thy Name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world" (John 17:6). In the former case they are a gift from God in virtue of His sufferings and death: in the latter they are a gift from the Father to His Son because of the eternal worth of His Person.

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy (or annul) him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who

through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." To be thus identified with them, it was imperative that He should first take part in the same bodily condition as they, flesh and blood, in order that His blood might be shed in sacrifice, that by means of death He might cancel the dread power of Satan over men. Nothing but this could righteously meet the case. Nor could anything but love have energized a sacrifice like this. Let us note that here we have a second reason for the sufferings of Christ. In verse 10 the glory of God is in view: in verse 14 the destruction of Satan.

This involves deliverance then for those who were "all their lifetime subject to bondage," that is, the bondage of sin, by which Satan had wielded his power over mankind. "The sting of death is sin," and so long as this question remained unsettled, "the fear of death" held souls in bondage. He is speaking here of believers of course, for unbelievers know nothing of present deliverance from this fear and bondage, as do all whose trust is in the precious blood of Christ. Observe too that this bondage is during "lifetime," not after death. Even the unsaved are not in such bondage after death. Satan can exert no more authority over them: they are rather imprisoned in bondage to the exclusive authority of God.

But previous to the death of Christ even believers were held in a distinct measure of bondage through fear of death. There are some brightly shining exceptions, in cases where various saints exercised a faith that carried them far beyond the limits of the partial revelation they had received; and Jacob for instance shows thorough tranquillity in the face of death. This was not the common state, nevertheless, of which the godly Hezekiah is an example, weeping in bitterness when told to put his house in order in view of his death (Isaiah 38:1-3; 17).

"For He does not indeed take hold of angels, but He takes hold of the seed of Abraham" (N. Trans.). In grace He has seen fit to identify Himself, not with angelic beings, but a class lower in creative order,-mankind,-yet that class of mankind characterized by faith, the "seed of Abraham," a family in which the heart of God the Father finds pleasure.

"Wherefore it behoved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things relating to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (N. Trans.). The full and blessed reality of our Lord's humanity is thus strongly emphasized for us. This is of course humanity in untainted perfection and purity, in which the foreign element of sin could have no place; yet nevertheless true humanity, as to spirit and soul and body. Only thus could He be a High Priest, a Mediator between God and

men. Entering into their physical condition of weakness and dependence, He is thoroughly qualified by experience to have merciful consideration for their need, and to act faithfully for them in consistency with such a relationship.

But this must of necessity first require that the question of His people's sins should be faced, and as true Man and true Priest He had made "propitiation for the sins of the people." Indeed, in reference to this great work, He is both Priest, Sacrifice and Altar. Propitiation is a third reason here noted for the death of Christ,-first God's glory, secondly Satan's destruction, thirdly, propitiation, which last denotes the satisfying of the claims of God's throne in regard to man's sin.

This verse is clear to the effect that He must be a Priest in order to sacrifice Himself. Chapter 8:4 is no contradiction to this: "If He were on earth He should not be a priest, seeing there are priests that offer gifts and sacrifices according to the law." In this latter case the apostle speaks of an official position, which on earth was given to the sons of Aaron, but now in resurrection given to the Lord Jesus in Glory,-"saluted of God all High Priest after the order of Melchisedek." This is an office only assumed in Glory.

But in Person, if not in office, His character of Priest manifested in all His life of ministry to mankind, and in His voluntary sacrifice of Himself. For His own sacrifice was not an official act, but one purely voluntary, prompted by the perfect love and grace of His heart,-not in any sense required of Him, except by the very goodness of His own nature. Thus in our present verses, His moral nature and character are emphasized; so that when later He is seen in resurrection to be given official glory from God as High Priest, it has been fully established that He is worthy to be utterly trusted to fulfil that office in perfection. Blessed, holy, gracious Lord!

For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted. He is able to help those that are tempted." Having proven Himself in lowly experience, - suffering rather than yielding to temptation, - He is Himself a strength to His suffering people, able to give grace that they should bear rather than succumb to temptation. Having such an High Priest, what a shame that we should ever give way when tempted. But here we have a fourth reason for His sufferings, - that He might have perfect sympathy with His suffering saints. How full and orderly is the precious Word of God!

Chapter 3

3: 1-6: The Son superior to Moses

Verse 1: Holy brothers

Verses 1 – 2 (jointly): Consider the Son

Verses 3-6: The Son contrasted with Moses

"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling." Let us keep in mind that this is addressed to Jewish believers. How great a contrast to that which their own religion had taught them! Earthly hopes now they must leave behind, and as "holy brethren," set apart by virtue of identification with the blessed Person of the Lord Jesus, were to recognize themselves as partakers of the heavenly calling. Israel in rejecting their Messiah had forfeited all title to their longed for earthly inheritance; but God had in grace provided a transcendently greater blessing for those who in their hearts received His beloved Son.

Now, in properly considering Him - the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, - the significance of this is more clearly seen. It will be observed that both the Deity and the Manhood of the Lord Jesus are vitally involved in what is now presented to us. Also, both Moses and Aaron are seen to be types of this blessed One: hence there are comparisons, while yet, these being noted, there is greater emphasis upon the contrasts in this great Person to the lesser glories of Moses and Aaron. Indeed angels have before been set aside in His favor, and certainly men ought to be.

"Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus" (N. Trans.). The official title "Christ" evidently had no place here in the original, for the insistence here is upon His Personal Name of moral grace and beauty, in both the lowliness and dignity of true Manhood. But as the Apostle, He is One sent of God, to maintain the sovereign rights of God in reference to the people. As the High Priest He is One come in grace to maintain the cause of the people in reference to God. In these Moses typifies the first, Aaron the second.

"Who is faithful to Him that appointed Him, as also Moses was faithful in all His house." This faithfulness to God is true of Him both as Apostle and High Priest, but He is compared here first to Moses, as He is later to Aaron (Ch. 5:4). Doubtless the house here referred to is the tabernacle, in which was represented God's relationship with the people, and in which Moses was careful to conform to the pattern given him of God.

But if verse 2 is comparison, verse 3 is contrast. Moses had been faithful in God's house; but Christ is the Builder of the house, worthy of greater honour than the house itself, and therefore than any servant in the house. "For every house is builded by some man; but He that built all things is God" The force of the passage is simply that a house testifies to the fact that someone must have built it. Creation testifies also that it has a Builder greater than itself. "He that built all things is God." Note that this again proves the Deity of the Lord Jesus, Whom verse 3 declares the Builder. It is not that all creation is the object in view in what is said here, but rather that, if He built all things, then He certainly built that of which the tabernacle is a type, "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

Beautiful it is however to consider the faithful devotion of Moses as a servant in God's house, a servant obeying the word of his Master, in order that the house (the tabernacle) should rightly represent the God who in grace dwelt there. The reader may profitably consider Exodus 39 and 40 as to this matter, where it is evident that Moses was extremely diligent to see that every detail conformed to the commandment of the Lord. "According to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so the children of Israel made all the work. And Moses did look upon all the work, and behold they had done it as the Lord had commanded, even so had they done it: and Moses blessed them" (Ex. 39:42, 43). Eight times in Ch. 40 the expression is repeated, "As the Lord commanded Moses."

Moreover, our verse 5 continues, "for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after." The tabernacle was a type of that which was to be revealed afterward (and has now been revealed). Thus the servant Moses has borne testimony to the truth of God even in that which was but a type of the church. And if so, does our God expect any less faithfulness to His Word in the church itself? Indeed, how diligent ought every servant of the Lord be that the Word of our God be faithfully followed in its entirety. Let the faithful testimony of Moses be taken to heart, and bear its proper fruit in encouraging the saints of God today.

3:7-19: Warning against departing from the living God

Verses 7-10: The sin of heart-hardening

Verse 11: The penalty – forfeiture of God's rest

Verses 12-16 The deceitfulness of sin

Verses 17-19: The tragedy of unbelief

"But Christ as a Son over His house." The word "own" is not correctly inserted here, for he is speaking all through of God's house, though of course that house has different character today, for it is the antitype rather than the type. But here is One who, because of equal dignity with the Father, is to be trusted utterly to order the house in perfect wisdom and truth. "The Father loveth the Son, and hath committed all things into His hand." This is far above Moses, or any other servant.

"Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." The apostle here is certainly not seeking to unsettle faith, but to encourage it. But he would definitely unsettle anyone who rested upon anything but Christ. All false confidences would eventually leave souls bereft and hopeless. Profession must necessarily be tested, and its reality is proven only by continuance. Some of the Hebrews who had publicly embraced Christianity were giving it up, and returning to Judaism. Did they actually then have part in the house of God? No: their giving up proved they had never really been brought in faith to the Lord Jesus. Faith is not a mere cloak one may put on and later put off again. It is rather the vital gift of God (Eph. 2:8, 9), which purifies the heart, remaining as the settled attitude of its possessor; and it is proven only by holding fast the confidence and rejoicing of hope firm unto the end.

"Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith,) Today, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation in the wilderness." One who has merely made a profession without reality may easily harden his heart. The wilderness history of Israel served to bring out what was actually in their hearts. Just so, if one is a mere rocky ground hearer, the seed might spring up quickly, then when persecution or tribulation arises because of the Word, the truth of the Word is as quickly renounced, the heart hardened against what the conscience had previously approved. Christ is given up because He was not actually in the heart. "The day of provocation" refers to man's provoking God to anger. Their rebellion was occasioned by their circumstances of trial, but this was only the occasion, not the reason. If man excuses himself by protesting that he was provoked to rebel, let him think again that such rebellion is a reason for God's being rightly provoked to judge him. They tempted God: He bore long with them. They proved Him: times unnumbered He proved faithful and gracious in spite of their self-will. They saw His works of grace and power forty years. But all this, together with His patient forbearance they treated with contempt, and time thus proved their hearts false and ignorant of God's ways.

This was the general condition of the people. They were all surrounded by and partook of the benefits of God's goodness in publicly blessing the nation; yet

proved themselves cold in heart toward the God Who fed them. Doubtless there were individuals who differed but he speaks generally. God was grieved with that generation.

"So I sware in My wrath, If they shall enter into My rest." Both in the Psalm quoted (95) and here the verse is translated, "They shall not" etc., but the actual form is a question. Is the lesson not simply this, that since man dares to question the truth and faithfulness of God, by his proud rebellion, then does not God have a right to question man's title to blessing? In other words, profession must be questioned, or tested, to ascertain its reality.

Such being the case, how urgent is the warning of verse 12: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God," (or "in falling away from the living God"). He is not speaking of weakness of faith or of failure in details of conduct, but of an evil heart of unbelief, faith not being present at all. This is the cause of falling away, a fall into a state of cold rejection of One previously acknowledged as the Son of God. Only faith can maintain this position of firm confidence in the blessed Son of God; so that a mere lip profession that lacks this vital root of the matter, may very soon give place to a callous reaction of deliberate apostasy, from which there is no recovery: the living God is rejected, and the only alternative is the cold, cheerless state of death.

"But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." If in the case of those truly born again, this exhortation would stimulate and encourage their faith, it might also, in the case of any who lacked faith, be the means of awakening and bringing them in reality to the Lord Himself, and thus prevent so dreadful a fall. For sin will harden, however innocent its face may at first appear; and those deceived by it will choose eventually to mock at faith. The expression "while it is called today" insists that the present is the time of testing, which may abruptly end at any moment.

"For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." Similarly to verse 6, the emphasis is on continuance as the proof of whether one has actually in his first profession been made a partaker of Christ. If an engrafted branch has really "struck" into a stock so as to partake of the sap of the tree, it will continue as a live, flourishing branch. If the "beginning" was not however a vital, real connection, the branch will wither and die.

Verse 15 refers again to "the provocation" in the wilderness, the limited time of testing; and the urgent entreaty here is evident: in the brief moment men are given to be proven, a false step may be eternally fatal. But if none in the wilderness had been exceptions to the general state of provocative unbelief, it might be cause for despair; but "not all that came out of Egypt with Moses" were guilty of this. "Some, when they heard, did provoke." The Word of God was despised: how solemn a sign!

"But with whom was He grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?" Patience bore long during this testing time, but because they had despised the land of promise, they died in the wilderness. Solemn consideration for those who today lightly esteem the heavenly glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the heavenly calling of His saints. It is important to make clear however that the issue in the wilderness was that merely of an earthly inheritance and temporal blessings, not the heavenly inheritance and eternal blessings. Falling away from Christ today is immeasurably more dreadful evil than Israel's despising the pleasant land: Israel's rebellion called for temporal judgment; but rebellion against Christ eternal judgment.

Verses 18 and 19 expose to our view the root of this rebellion on the part of Israel: it was not mere passive lack of faith, but active unbelief. The testimony of God had been declared: they had heard it, and had seen public evidences of its trustworthiness; but through fear of present discomfort and opposition of the Canaanites, they chose to disbelieve God. He told them to enter the land: they refused: only unbelief kept them out.



The author to the Hebrews reminded the believers of the wilderness wandering

Chapter 4

4:1-8: The Son superior to Joshua in the rest He gives

Verses 1-3b: The gospel, the source of rest

Verses 3c-8 God's creation rest is a type

"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." This admonition is a continuation of Ch. 3. The promise has been left us, but the promise is to faith: any who come short of it do so only through unbelief. Let us take solemnly to heart the significance of these lessons.

"For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them." Indeed, to us it has been preached in fullness: to them only "in part:" we therefore stand in a place fully as responsible as they - and more so. "But the Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" That Word is itself invincible, eternal, entirely unaffected by the kind of reception it receives; but he who will not receive it cannot receive profit from it.

4: 9-13: The Son superior to Joshua in the redemption he provides

Verses 9-10: Redemptive rest is available for God's people

Verses 11-13: The rest to be diligently realised.

"For we which have believed do enter into rest, as He said. As I have sworn in My wrath. If they shall enter into My rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world." Let its notice as to "we which have believed" there is absolute affirmation, for the promise is absolute. Yet this is followed by an "if," a question, -even though in the counsels of God the basis of rest had long been established. The true believer rests upon this basis; but the question is raised with those who have dared to raise a question as regards the truth of God's promise, that is, the unbeliever. The believer's position therefore is absolutely secure, dependent on the truth of God's Word; but the unbeliever has the oath of God to the contrary) The blessing is dependent upon God's work, the value of which is available to everyone, by faith; but unbelief is a base refusal of the blessing, because it refuses God's Word.

Verses 4 to 10 must be considered together, to be properly understood. "For He spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all His works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into

My rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief; Again, He limiteth a certain day, saying in David, Today, after so long a time; as it is said, Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus (Joshua) had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into His rest, he also bath ceased from his own works, as God did from His."

Verse 4 illustrates the fact of how full of deeper meaning may be a brief Scriptural statement of a historical fact. God's rest intimates that He had in mind an eternal rest pursuant to all His working with this present creation. Verse 5 then quoting Psalm 95:11 indicates that some would not enter into His rest. Verse 6 therefore concludes that "some must enter therein." God's rest was not merely for His own enjoyment, but He had decreed that this was to be shared with others. The latter part of the verse shows that those who had first opportunity did not enter in. Doubtless this has direct reference to the unbelieving generation in the wilderness, but may be rightly applied to Israel the nation when the Gospel was preached "to the Jew first," and hence be a solemn warning to present day Hebrews.

However, verse 7 goes further than verse 6, and quotes from David, "after so long a time." Even those who did enter into the land and had been so long in it, had not really entered God's rest, for there they were admonished not to harden their hearts. It was Joshua who had brought them into the land (Jesus is the Greek form of the same name), but he had not given them this rest, for after their advent there, another day is spoken of. The rest therefore, as verse 9 shows, is still future.

Verse 10 explains this. In the fullest sense, it is only in the eternal state that we shall rest from our own works. All things there will be entirely of God, with no admixture of man's works. Toil will have no place, for toil is the result of the marring of creation. "His servants shall serve Him" infers not toil, but perfect tranquillity in service. There is another sense of course in which the believer has entered into rest; that is, so far as conscience is concerned, and the guilt of his sins, faith in Christ has already given him rest, and he has in this regard ceased from his own works: he no longer depends on his own works to procure blessing from God. But fullness of rest is future.

"Let us therefore use diligence to enter into that rest, that no one may fall after the same example of not hearkening to the Word" (N. Trans.). The matter is of vital consequence, and well worth applying ourselves in serious earnestness. A negative attitude is fatal, for it ignores the clearly spoken Word of God. If there

were any indifferences to the glory of the revelation of God in the Person of Christ, the testing of tribulation or persecution would expose it: that person would fall. The only protection for the soul is a positive, real faith in the blessed Son of God, an ear opened to receive the Word of God as living truth. Who can dare claim the knowledge of God if he refuses Scripture as the revelation of God? There is certainly none other, and it remains the one solid foundation for faith.

"For the Word of God is living and operative, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and penetrating to the division of soul and spirit, both of joints and marrow', and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (N. Trans.). How this transcends all human writings. which become mere stagnant pools in contrast to the constantly flowing freshness of this river of the water of life. Its every part is full of fresh vitality, ready to meet every demand of faith upon it, for if we fail to find fresh blessing, wisdom, encouragement, from any part, this is our own failure, for the living truth is there. Moreover, it is pregnant with energy that begets active response and results where there is faith: it is operative. More than this, however, it cuts: it is no respecter of persons. A two-edged sword cuts both ways. If one would use it, he must be prepared for its cutting in regard to his own conduct and doctrine just as to that of others. It pierces and divides, that is, penetrating beneath the surface of things, it distinguishes in finest precision between things that differ. Soul and spirit could never be distinguished by mere observation or human wisdom. Yet the Word of God clearly discerns between the two, attributing to the former all that expresses feeling, emotion, passion; and to the latter intellect, reasoning, understanding, conscience. These two entities in man are entirely above natural science, though natural science actually bears witness to the necessity of their existence. But joints and marrow are more naturally understandable, and the scientist knows the distinction, the one being external, the other the necessary internal ingredient by which the joints operate effectually. This is but one symbolic illustration then of the Word's character of dividing in any realm between outward form and inward operation. How we need this for the guidance of our own souls!

But more: it discerns the very thoughts and intents of the heart. In these things we are all too likely to be self-deceived, and in order to maintain self-respect will seek to persuade ourselves that our motives are actually better than they are; or to hide our actual intentions or desires under a plausible cover of avowing that we want the leading of the Lord! But let us honestly read the Word of God, and it will expose to us these secret workings, and make manifest the counsels of the heart. This is strikingly seen in Jeremiah 42, where Johanan and the remnant of Israel required of Jeremiah as to the will of God, declaring their absolute intention of obeying God's Word. But the Word given them also

discerned the actual dissembling of their hearts, (vs. 20, 21), and Jeremiah told them they would not obey the Word of God, but do their own will. Then their brazen actions proved the Word of the Lord to be right, but they excused themselves by denying it to be the Word of God! How little does man suspect the actual deceit of his own heart! May God give us to judge ourselves by His Word, the only trustworthy standard. It can be a grievous snare to us to assume that our preferences are consistent with the Word of God, then when the Word is given us to the contrary, to object that it must be a wrong translation or wrong interpretation, and thus dismiss it without honest inquiry.

But verse 13 follows on to say, "neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do." While he is speaking of the Word of God, yet he says, "His sight," not "its sight." Does this not emphasize the fact that God's Word is virtually Himself. It expresses Him as nothing else on earth can do. "Thou hast magnified Thy Word above all Thy Name" (Psa. 138:2). This does not of course mean the physical Bible, but God's mind and will revealed in the Bible. If men profess to honour the Name of God, then His Word must be given supreme place in their lives. Indeed, it is our one means of knowing God. And it brings us under the light of His own countenance, fully exposed by infinite light and wisdom. This can be welcome only to faith: unbelief is terrified of such eyes of perfect penetration: and seeks to avoid God's eyes by closing its own eyes!

The last expression of the verse is however inescapable, "the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do." To close the eyes or the ears now will not affect our having to do with Him. He will not retire from the scene, to indulge man's love for darkness. How indescribably better to welcome those eyes now than to have them expose all the hidden things of darkness at the Great White Throne; and the end eternal remorse!

4:14-5:10: Christ's priesthood superior to Aaron's

4: 14-16: Our great high priest.

5:1-4: Qualifications of Aaronic priests

5: 5-10: Superiority of Christ's qualifications

Verse 14 begins a distinct division in the book, in which the Heavenly Priesthood of Christ is dwelt upon, and His eternally finished work of propitiation, in contrast with the Aaronic priesthood on earth, the work of which was never finished. This subject continues to the end of Ch. 10.

"Having therefore a Great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast the confession" (N. Trans.). The fact of His High Priesthood has been briefly mentioned at the end of Ch. 2, and in Ch. 3:1: now the subject is to be fully developed. As Aaron on the day of atonement passed through all the tabernacle, so the Lord Jesus has passed through the heavens, to the very throne of God, the ultimate in exaltation. This is our Great High Priest upon Whom faith depends for the establishing of an eternal relationship with God: He cannot fail; therefore what folly it would be to give up the confession of His Name. So firm, so unshakeable a foundation calls for the utmost holding fast of our confession.

"For we have not an High Priest not able to sympathize with our infirmities, but tempted in all things in like manner, sin apart" (N. Trans.). Though now exalted (and what joy to know Him as in the Glory!), yet He has previously passed through the circumstances of earth's sorrow, trial, distress, and in fullest measure, so that He understands through experience all the sorrows and trials of His saints, - "in all points tempted," not from within, but from without. For He was without sin, and certainly the corrupting influences of evil had no place in His holy body, - no sickness, disease or malady of any kind. But he has moved amid such circumstances, has felt the sorrows, has borne the sicknesses, in the sense of feeling in deepest sympathy for those so afflicted. Blessed compassion indeed! And His heart remains as tender and sympathetic as in all that wondrous path of grace. In Him too we know there was perfect, pure resistance of every temptation that might tend to overwhelm faith. And the secret of our own resistance is communion with Himself.

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." This is no mere self-confidence, which would be "strange fire" (Lev. 10: 1, 2), but firmest confidence in the Lord Jesus, - no trepidation or cringing apprehension, but a calm (though reverential) sense of being heartily welcome. For we find the majestic throne of God to be in truth a "throne of grace." While His great glory is maintained, yet His grace is there dispensed in fullest measure. The blessed sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is the basis of this character of grace attaching to the throne of God.

There is a distinction here drawn between obtaining mercy and finding grace to help in time of need. Mercy is that heartfelt compassion that comes into the circumstances of sorrow or trial; it regards one as in such circumstances; whereas grace is active favour, a power that lifts one above his circumstances. Note Ephesians 2:46 in this regard. Man's condition of misery is seen in verse 3, then mercy and love in verse 4, and the active work of grace in verses 5 and 6,

raising up and seating together all saints in the heavenlies, in Christ. Blessed communication of Divine favour. And such grace is constantly available in practical life below. What real, encouraging incentive to constant, effectual prayer!

Chapter 5

"For every High Priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins." The apostle of course refers to the priesthood of Aaron and his sons, which is typical of the priesthood of the Lord Jesus, and first noted are some definite comparisons. Being ordained for men in things pertaining to God indicates a provision from God's hand to care for man's interests as regards his relationship with God. The offering of gifts and sacrifices for sins was the chief work of the high priest. These things are pre-eminently true of Christ. But comparison ends here, for Aaron's priesthood was for earth alone and the offering of his sacrifices only of a temporary formal value; while in contrast Christ's priesthood is eternal, and the value of His work eternal.

"Who can have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way." is we know blessedly true of our Lord, and infinitely more so than any earthly priest. But here again comparison ends, for of Aaron and his family it is said: "he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins." Aaron was to sympathize with the people because his nature was the same, and his offerings were as necessary for himself as for them. The sympathy of our Lord is rather the result of His omniscient wisdom and of His lowly humiliation in voluntary suffering and death, - entering into our circumstances in pure grace. Wondrous contrast indeed! And His sympathy is more full and pure than could be that of the most tender-hearted son of Aaron.

"And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron" It is God exclusively who decides who is fitted for this place of holy mediation between God and man. Man has not an iota of choice in this appointment. In human affairs, it is common that both sides in reference to any discussion, must agree as to a mediator, but in this matter God alone can be trusted to make the proper appointment, and He reserves this to Himself.

"So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an high priest; but He that said unto Him, Thou art My Son, today have I begotten Thee." This appointment too is fully of God, but it is not mere external appointment. The very announcement by God at His birth, declaring the proper Personal glory of His Son, implies that

in Person He is essentially God's High Priest. There is nothing similar to this in Aaron. No personal attributes had the slightest bearing on his priesthood, which was continued by mere natural succession.

Here however we must distinguish between official appointments and that which our Lord is by nature. Some have insisted that Christ was not an high priest on earth, assuming this from Ch. 8:4. But there he speaks of official priesthood, which on earth was confined to the sons of Aaron. In this the Lord Jesus could have no part. Yet our present verse is plain to the effect that in Person He was priest by the very fact of His incarnation. When God announced Him as His Son, this was actually glorifying Him as High Priest. But it was not yet official appointment, which must be necessarily of a character far higher than Aaronic priesthood,- not earthly, but heavenly.

This is now referred to in verse 6, which is the actual official announcement of His High Priesthood: "Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." This is a quotation from Psalm 110:4, which must have awakened the wonder of any godly Jew who read it. For Melchisedec was a priest long before Aaron, and though only briefly mentioned in history (Gen. 14), yet the evident approval of God was upon that history: he was "priest of the Most High God." Here was an order independent of Aaron, and previous to Aaron, yet an order that had no place in the nation Israel on earth. Wonderful indeed is the reason for this, for this man was typical of, not an earthly, but a heavenly priesthood, which is fully entered into by our Lord only in His resurrection.

For verses 8 and 9 most beautifully show that in His earthly path He assumed no official place whatever, but rather a place of lowliest humiliation: "Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him Who was able to save Him from (or 'out of') death, and was heard in that He feared. Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered."

All of this is the blessed moral proof of His Person as One fully qualified for an eternal Priesthood. The verses are transcendently lovely in showing that He was really (if not officially) the High Priest of God, for He offered up prayers and supplications, - a true priestly work. Indeed, Heb. 7:27 also speaks of His sacrifice on Calvary as a Priestly work: "He offered up Himself,"-not a work required because of official position, but the willing outflow of His own nature of pure love and grace.

But further, was not all His earthly path one of godly preparation and proof as regards His qualifications for an eternal priesthood? His ability to take the

lowest place in suffering, in faithful dependence upon the living God, even unto death, has marvellously proven Him worthy of the highest exaltation, worthy to receive, beyond the reach of death, an unchangeable priesthood.

Thus, He was saved "out of death," not saved from dying, but in resurrection saved out of that state to which His unselfish devotion had willingly descended. His prayers were heard because of His unwavering piety and devotion to God, and He was raised from the dead in righteousness. None other could fulfill such blessed qualifications: this is the Priest we need, Him whose intercession with God can never fail, He who has learned in experience what obedience really means, - learned this by the things which He suffered. "Though He were a Son," and therefore in a place of dignity and glory, accustomed to command, yet He has taken the place of Servant, learning experimentally the true character of obedience, in suffering; and moreover an obedience exquisitely perfect. Wonderful grace! wonderful condescension on the part of the Lord of Glory!

And having been perfected, became to all that obey Him Author of eternal salvation; addressed by God as High Priest according to the order of Melchisedec." This will be seen to compare with Ch. 2:10: "perfected through sufferings" This experience in suffering was necessary to qualify Him perfectly as the Author of eternal salvation; and in resurrection this preparatory rigorous experience is seen to have been perfectly completed in every respect. His accomplishing of eternal salvation too is on behalf of "all that obey Him" His obedience is the pattern of theirs. This includes all believers. It does not mean that they obey Him in every detail, but rather that, in submission of heart they yield to Him "the obedience of faith:" it is in other words the proper character of every believer to obey. Certainly a believer ought to be true to character in everything; but this is his character.

Verse 10 therefore is the definite salutation of God in appointing Him to His present exalted place of High Priest, an eternal appointment according to the order of Melchisedec. Here is an office unchangeable, not passing to another, never to be shared with another, and hence in infinite contrast to the office of Aaron.

5: 11-14: Appeal to maturity

Verses 11-13: Characteristics of the immature

Verse 14: Contrast of the mature

"Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing." The very brevity of Melchisedec's history (in Gen. 14) and the lone comment of Psalm 110:4 ("Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec") should surely have stirred the exercise of every godly Jew with desire to know the reason for this. And ought not every Scripture stir our own hearts with longing to know the mind of God in it? But just as it was hard to interpret these things to the Hebrews, so often we find interpretation too difficult. And why? Simply because of dullness of hearing.

The apostle will go on to speak of Melchisedec in ch. 7; but first he must deal with this affliction that so prevents our glad reception of the precious truth of God. "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (or solid food). Among many of the Gentiles to whom Paul preached there had been far more healthy response and growth than among Jewish believers in their own land. Earthly aspirations and national pride were no small hindrance to spiritual growth: the mind set in the wrong direction will have its dulling effect upon sight and hearing. At least they ought to have been able to teach fundamental principles of the grace of God, but had relapsed to a point of needing such teaching themselves. Let saints of God take this to heart today, and be prepared for the "solid food" of the Word of God.

"For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But solid food belongeth to them who are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." It should be only briefly that we are confined to elementary principles, as a babe must be for a time confined to milk. Not that we should ever lose our taste for "the sincere milk of the Word" (1 Pet. 2:2), for even the simplest things require constant exercise and spiritual digestion; but there must be the addition of good solid food to produce proper growth and strength. This calls for skill in the use of the Word of God, and healthy exercise of the senses in discerning between principles of good and evil. It is no mere mental stimulus or progress, but a moral and spiritual condition that is not dormant, but subject to the stirring of soul-exercise.

Chapter 6

6:1-3: Pressing on to full growth

Verse 1a: Exhortation to spiritual progress

Verse 1b – 2: Danger of spiritual retrenchment

Verse 3: The dynamic of spiritual progress

Verse 1 of this chapter is not properly translated in the Authorized Version, and it should be evident that we must never leave "the principles of the doctrine of Christ." Divine principles and sound doctrine must be unalterably the vital basis of all Christianity. But the New Translation reads rightly, "Wherefore, leaving the word of the beginning of the Christ, let us go on (to what belongs) to full growth, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith in God, of the doctrine of washings, and of imposition of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment; and this will we do if God permit." Though Christ had come, and the glory of God had been so revealed in Him, yet Jewish believers, being zealous for the law, were as yet babes occupied with those things that formerly pointed to Christ, -the sign-posts of Old Testament doctrines, - rather than with Christ Himself. This could give no perfection, or mature growth. Let us not turn back to engage our attention with the signposts but go on to where the sign-posts direct us, the full knowledge of Him in Whom all perfection is found. The teaching of the Old Testament is a foundation for the more vital teaching of Christianity. The law itself called for "repentance from dead works," by the very fact of its condemnation of evil. It called for "faith toward God," but it did not reveal "the glow of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It had its ceremonial "baptisms and laying on of hands," - formal cleansings indicating the need of moral cleansing; formal identification with the offering of animals, etc. (Cf. Lev. 1:4), typical of a vital identification with Christ in His great work of atonement. "The resurrection of the dead" was a well-known doctrine. Law itself demanded such a doctrine, for its claims of justice and equity were not met in the brief span of man's earthly existence: there was an accounting yet to be made. (There was however no teaching nor understanding of a "resurrection from among the dead," that is, of the distinct resurrection of saints at the coming of the Lord.) "Eternal judgment" too is a doctrine that law required and bore witness to, for if the authority of God is despised, His wrath against such rebellion must be consistent with His very nature; it must be eternal. These then are elementary principles preparatory to the revelation of the Person of Christ.

6: 4-8 The sin of lapsing back into Judaism

Verses 4-5: The subjects – Hebrew believers

Verse 6: The nature of the sin – defection from the all-sufficient nature of Christ's death.

Verse 7-8: The result of the sin.

6: 9-12 The contrast of maturity in Christ

Verses 9-10 The better things of salvation

Verses 11-12 The author's desire

6: 13-20 Encouragement to maturity in Christ

Verses 13-18a: God's faithfulness to Abraham

Verses 18b-20: God's faithfulness in Christ

But the apostle acids a most serious condition as to "going on to perfection," - "this will we do, if God permit." Faith has in it a maturing energy and will go on to full growth. But there are other conditions in which God will not permit this "going on to perfection." This is elucidated in verses 4 to 8, where the case is plainly one of mere profession without actual faith, a profession deliberately abandoned in defiance of every clearly witnessed truth which had once been outwardly embraced. In so solemn a case, God will judicially harden, and allow no recovery and therefore no progress.

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame." Let us note this well, that here is a class of persons whom "it is impossible to renew again to repentance." These are not merely ignorant souls who have been linked with some denomination, then lost interest in it. Nor are they true believers who have become lax in their ways and have "left their first love," needing to be restored to the joy of their salvation. But they are those once privileged with all the outward blessings of a Christianity that at that time was pure, fresh and vigorous, and have known its precious truths; then have callously, deliberately refused it.

First, "they were once enlightened," but though mentally enlightened, the light had not penetrated the heart. Secondly, they had "tasted of the heavenly gift." But in tasting they had not eaten; and having tasted they knew what they were refusing. Thirdly, "were made partakers of the Holy Ghost." The word for "partakers" may be rightly rendered "companions," and implies that they had intimate association with the manifest power of the Spirit in the early church; but in spite of so great witness, had not "received the love of the truth," so that Romans 5:5 was never true of them: "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us." They were partakers in an outward sense merely, never had the Spirit of God indwell them. Fourthly, "and have tasted the good Word of God." Here again, tasting was not receiving, no actual assimilation of it, no "drinking in" (Cf. vs. 7). The fifth of these privileges which gave them such responsibilities is that they had tasted "the powers of the world to come." Miraculous powers had accompanied the institution of Christianity particularly in Jerusalem, - powers that have their place properly in the Millennial age: they had witnessed these, so that any desertion of Christianity in this case could only be deeply culpable guilt.

Their "falling away" therefore in verse 6 is their turning deliberately against the marvellous and clearly attested truths they had once professed to embrace. This is apostasy. There remains no possibility that such souls as this will be "renewed again to repentance:" so rebellious a stand against known truth incurs the judicial blinding of God. We must not however infer that this is true of every case of profession of Christianity, which may be given up. For today there are no such marked public evidences of the truth of Christianity as in those early days. Present-day Christendom has compromised its purity: its freshness and vigour have gone. Its corruption and division are in great contrast to its inception in the blessed power and liberty of the Spirit of God. Yet there is still solemn warning in these verses. If one has actually known the truth of Christianity and the reality of its being of God, then deliberately to turn against the Lord Jesus is to seal his own doom. This is, in personal attitude, to "crucify the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame," - to willingly give approval to His crucifixion and rejection by the world. This would compare with the "sin against the Holy Ghost," which is never forgiven.

"For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned." As these two types of earth differ fundamentally, so is the line drawn between true believer and false professor. To "drink in the rain," the earth must be pliable and porous. Where the plow has done its

cultivating work, the implanted seed will respond to the gentle rains and bear fruit. So the stirring work of the Spirit of God prepares by true repentance that which is then called "good ground," and the fresh water of the Word of God is taken into the soul, bearing fruit and receiving blessing from God.

But where the rain from heaven is not drunk in, the arid ground produces thorns and briars, - only abortive attempts at fruitfulness. So a heart untouched by the blessed work of repentance, not drinking in the pure Word of God, may make some show of Christianity for a time, but will in the end bring forth what is harmful rather than good. The thorns will be burnt, for they will not be allowed to remain to cause hurt and damage. But the person who produces them, actually choosing them in preference to the good he has known, must suffer the same dread judgment of God.

But if the first 8 verses are a solemn test of profession, and warning against a mere outward adherence to Christianity without reality, the remaining verses of the chapter are of the utmost, sweetest assurance and encouragement to the true believer. "But beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." How beautifully calculated is such a verse to appeal to all in whom faith is a reality. Faith will produce better things, things consistent with salvation. For those things produced by an apostate can never accompany salvation, proving that he never had known salvation.

"For God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward His Name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." The very nature and character of God is such that it is impossible for Him to overlook the evidences of true faith. On the one hand He is perfectly righteous to reject a profession that shows no faith, but on the other hand His very righteousness requires that He fully recognize every "work and labor of love" shown "toward His Name." Such motives of love can be the result only of faith in Him Personally: and the eternal assurance of the believer is vitally bound up with God's perfect righteousness. He can forget nothing that is the actual fruit of "love toward His Name." This was publicly seen in one's treatment of the saints of God. Persecution and reproach was at the time rigorous, and those who would persist in ministering to the welfare of the saints would expose themselves to the enemy's hatred. Thus faith was a necessity for continuance.

"And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end." Diligence was there, but he desired it on the part of every individual among them: only such endurance would evidence "the

full assurance of hope;" for if one would apostatize from Christ, he would prove himself utterly devoid of any assurance of the hope of Christianity. "The hope" is of course anticipation of the future, but with "full assurance,"-no element of uncertainty.

"That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Lax indifference to the glory of God's revelation in the Person of His Son is inexcusable. Others had avoided slothfulness, and had maintained faith and endurance; both New Testament saints (such as leaders mentioned in Ch. 13:7) and the grand examples of faith in the Old Testament, as seen in Ch. 11. Such faith is worth our wholehearted following; for the promises were given only to faith, and faith alone will inherit them.

"For when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise." This quotation comes from Gen. 22:15-18. How manifestly it is intended to contrast with Hebrews 4:3: "As I have sworn in My wrath, if they shall enter into My rest." In this latter case the oath of God raises a solemn question as to those who in unbelief have questioned God's faithfulness. But here in Ch. 6 how strong an oath from the mouth of God assures Abraham of His unconditional blessing, because Abraham believed God. God swore by Himself. The entire glory of God then is involved in this great oath. Wonderful, unchangeable, absolute certainty! And if the fulfilment of the promise was long delayed, yet this waiting time would but prove the reality of the faith that believed God: "he patiently endured."

"For men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife." Far more importance thus is attached to an oath than to merely the word of man. Thus, grace on the part of God deigns to make this solemn oath, to give us unshaken assurance of His blessing. Indeed, His word is fully as certain as His oath, but the very fact of His oath is condescension of tender compassion toward man, in desire for our fullest certainty. How marvelously gracious He is!

"Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." Let us note first that His counsel is immutable: there is absolute impossibility of change. The oath actually adds nothing to the Word, but only confirms it. But this beautifully displays the abundant goodness and willingness of God's heart to

give every encouraging assurance to the heirs of promise. His Word is immutable, and of course His oath also is immutable: it is impossible for Him to lie. But this faithful consideration is for the "strong consolation" of the believer, who in dire need has "fled for refuge" to Him in whom alone is hope.

"The hope set before us" is heavenly in contrast to Jewish earthly hopes, - "an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil." Let us observe that this hope allows no element of doubt, but involves rather the utmost certainty of anticipation. What an anchor of the soul! Stability, consistency, steadfastness will be ours in proportion as our souls lay hold upon the blessed reality of such hope.

A striking illustration of this verse was known in the days of sailing vessels. Particularly when the harbour entrance was narrow, a little boat called "the forerunner" would carry the anchor of the larger vessel into the harbor, and cast the anchor there. Then winding in the anchor cable, the vessel was drawn on a straight course into the harbour.

"Whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." If the veil involves some measure of obscurity, yet we know the blessed One who has entered there, and this assures our being drawn unerringly there, the wind and the waves of circumstance being of little consequence in this regard. This One who in lowly Manhood on earth has proven unchangeable, faithful, stable, - Jesus - (Name of unspeakable sweetness!) is rewarded in Glory with the dignity of an official, unchangeable Priesthood, "after the order of Melchisedec." Thus, both in perfect grace and perfect faithfulness the interests of His saints are presently and eternally cared for.

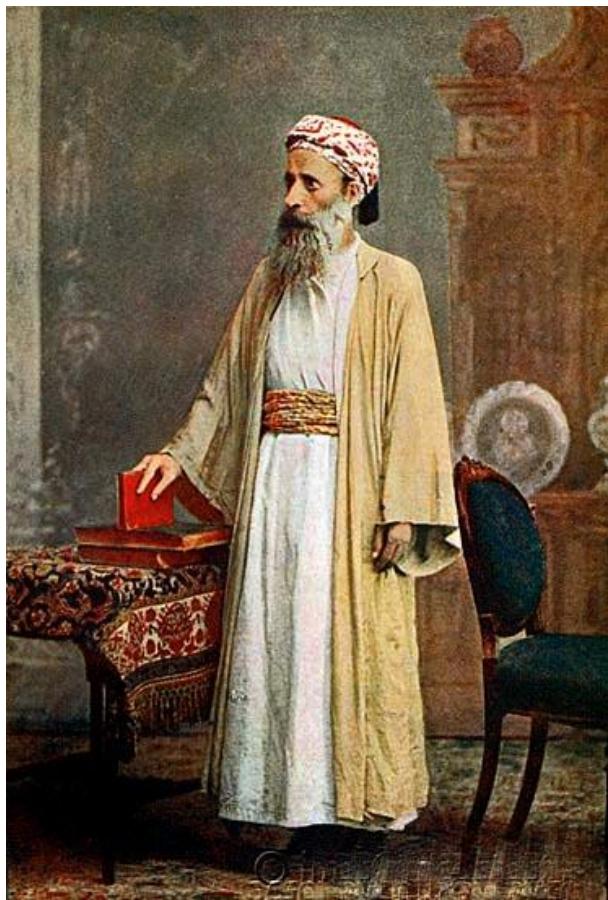
It will be noted that the necessary digression of the apostle begun at Ch. 5:11 is now concluded, and he returns to the precious consideration of the Melchisedec Priesthood of the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 7

7: 1-3 Melchizedek, the type of Christ as king-priest

Verses 1-3a: The identity of Melchizedek

Verse 3b: Melchizedek, a type of Christ



"For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him: to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all: first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem which is, King of peace: without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually." The brief record of Melchisedec found in Genesis 14 is as a shining light appearing momentarily and vanishing. But only thus is God's purpose served As typical of Christ's present official Priesthood in resurrection, this record is exquisitely beautiful. First, Melchisedec means "King of righteousness," and secondly, "King

of Salem" means "King of peace." Being the one perfect upholder of righteousness, Christ is also the one true Source of peace. The two cannot be divorced. And He is the one Mediator between God and men, the High Priest upon the throne of God. As Melchisedec blessed Abraham, bringing forth bread and wine for his refreshment after the stress of his contest with the kings, so the Lord Jesus, in the present day of grace, ministers to His saints the memorials of His wondrous death. for sustenance in an evil world, and for protection against the world's seductions, as instanced in the offer of the king of Sodom to Abraham (Gen. 15: 21, 22). Abraham, in response to Melchisedec's grace, rendered him a tenth of all the spoils, not as a legal requirement, but in willing-hearted recognition of his superior position. We cannot fail to see a typical character in this.

Verse 3 does not imply that Melchisedec personally had no parentage, no beginning or end, but that the record has designedly omitted any reference to these things, in order that he might be a striking type of Christ. He is not (as some have imagined) the Lord Himself, "but made like unto the Son of God." Since there is no record of his death, this implies that the Melchisedec priesthood is perpetual. How good to observe that this perpetual priesthood is so shown to have been in God's thoughts long before the introduction of the

temporary priesthood of Aaron and his sons in Judaism. But only by means of these many omissions as to Melchisedec's history could this man serve as a type of Christ as Son of God. How intricately beautiful is the Word of God in its wisdom and precision!

7: 4-22 The superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood to Aaron's

Verses 4-7, 9-10: Aaron paid tithes to Melchizedek

Verse 8: Aaron's priesthood was temporary, Melchizedek's permanent

Verses 11-14: The Aaronic priesthood was limited

Verses 15-22: The Melchizedek priesthood is final

7: 23-28: The superior efficacy and perpetuity of Christ's priesthood

Verses 23-24: Its perpetuity

Verses 25-28: Its superior efficacy

"Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils." What profound significance this should have for an Israelite! Abraham, the highest, most honoured of all Israel's progenitors, had himself fully acknowledged another as greater than himself!



The golden Dome of the Rock stands over the site of Herod's temple, today a mosque, only accessible for Muslims

"And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham." While Abraham had given tithes, yet the Levites, who came out of the loins of Abraham, were commanded to take tithes of their Hebrew brethren. In Abraham they were subordinate to Melchisedec: under law their brethren were subordinate to them. How clearly this shows that law was an inferior thing to the Melchisedec priesthood, and therefore only temporary in character.

'But he whose descent is not counted from them, received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better. And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes paved tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him.' Thus Melchisedec, long prior in time to Levi, received tithes from Levi's great father, and conferred blessing on him, as one himself greater. Lovely picture of the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ bestowed on the man of faith!

The Levites also received tithes until they died, at which time this dignity ceased. This order of things was continually interrupted by death: how then could the order itself be permanent? But now, the true Receiver of tithes, the true Blessing, is the One of whom it is truly witnessed that He liveth. Melchisedec is a type of this only in the fact that Scripture gives no record of his death. Christ's Priesthood is permanent, because he lives.

Moreover, inasmuch as Levi's progenitor, Abraham, payed tithes to Melchisedec, then we conclude that Levi did so, for he was at that time "yet in the loins of his father." The entire legal system is therefore seen to be inferior to the blessed Person whom Melchisedec typifies, the Lord Jesus Christ.

"If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priest-hood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?" Here the apostle adds another strong and conclusive proof from the Old Testament that a change of the priesthood and of the law was imperative. "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law." Perfection is a vital subject in Hebrews, and one which the Jew must fully approve. But was it found in the law? Impossible! for if so why did the law bear witness that another priest should rise of an order not known under the law? Law in fact excluded all others from the priesthood except the line of Aaron; but it prophesied of a different order entirely. Moreover, if the priesthood were to

change to a completely different order, then the law must change: God's methods of dealing would certainly conform to the character of the priesthood He instituted.

"For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood." Indeed, King Uzziah, of the tribe of Judah, for his daring to enter the temple in a priestly capacity, was immediately smitten of God with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16-21). And the Lord Jesus while on earth sought no place whatever in the official priesthood; made no suggestion of assuming the place or duties of a priest in the temple.

Nevertheless, Scripture had established the fact that Israel's Messiah must be of the tribe of Judah; that the Son of David would sit upon David's throne in perpetuity (Isa. 9:6, 7). And more than this, Zechariah 6:12, 13 boldly says of this same blessed Person, "He shall be a priest upon His throne."

"And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment. but after the power of an endless life. For He testifieth, Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." The type is the more complete when we consider that Melchisedec was both king and priest. The Aaronic priesthood could never fill the former qualification, for the king could not rise out of Levi; but this lone, striking statement in Psalm 110:4 opens out wonderfully the truth of the necessary change in the order of priesthood.

This new priest must be constituted so, not by the law of a carnal commandment, - that is, a law governing the flesh in its condition subject to decay and death, - "but after the power of an endless life." He must be One Personally superior to death, though indeed He has in voluntary grace passed through it for our sakes, triumphed over it in the power of an endless life, which law could never have, nor give.

"For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God." In one respect therefore the dispensation of law was weak and unprofitable. While it was perfectly just and holy, hard and inflexible, yet it had no strength to introduce righteousness among men. True, it condemned unrighteousness, but was utterly weak as regards providing any remedy: it could expose the terrible loss that man had incurred by sin, but could provide no semblance of profit. It

could change nothing: it made nothing perfect, but rather confirmed the hopelessness of the actual condition that existed. Therefore, how infinitely greater is the "better hope" which brings perfection with it. Of course, this perfection is in the living Person of the blessed Son of God, Him whose endless life is the very essence of power and profit, Who in pure grace communicates life and eternal blessing to those once under sin and the sentence of death. And thus indeed "we draw nigh unto God," in contrast to the rigid distance that law had maintained.

But another great contrast in these two orders of priesthood must be noted. "And inasmuch as not without an oath He was made priest: (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by Him that said unto Him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec) by so much was Jesus made a surety of a better covenant." An oath involves what is binding and unalterable; hence no oath was made at all in reference to the induction of priests of Aaron's line; but it has been made in reference to Christ. Such an unchangeable oath then means that He is the surety of a better covenant, a covenant sure and unalterable.

And to this another contrast is added: "And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but this Man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood." Law required many priests, that is, High Priests: the new covenant allows but One. This was impossible under law, of course, for death intervened. But how blessed to contemplate this Priest, who "continueth ever," and His priesthood therefore unchangeable. All of these details are perfectly interwoven in marvelous consistency, bearing witness to the minute accuracy of the Old Testament as well as the New.

"Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come 'unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.' We may observe here how vitally the perpetuity of our salvation is bound together with the perpetuity of His Priesthood. This is salvation in its fullest and all-inclusive character, not simply the initial salvation of the soul, nor present salvation from the evils and pitfalls that beset the Christian path; but both of these, beside future salvation out of this world and for eternal glory. Blessed fulness indeed, and dependent utterly upon Him who "ever liveth to make intercession." Does this mean eternally dependent? Indeed so: and we should not want it to be otherwise, for it is dependence upon One eternally dependable.

"For such an High Priest became us, Who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." Aaron and his sons were not at

all suited to meet our actual need. The High Priest fully becoming to us must have infinitely higher characteristics. First, in character He must be holy, having unvarying love of good and hatred of evil. Secondly, in conduct He must be harmless, having no element of disregard for the need or welfare of others. Thirdly, in contact He must be undefiled, not in any measure contaminated by circumstances of corruption. Fourthly, His communion must be "separate from sinners," His path one that drew a clear line of demarcation between Himself and those in a course of sin. All these are seen beautifully in our blessed Lord in His entire path on earth, and of course in no other. But fifthly, He must be "made higher than the heavens." A mere earthly level of priesthood would not do. He must be given a position higher than all others, everything being subordinate to His authority, that He might use all things for the welfare of those for whose blessing He is appointed.

"Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people, for this He did once, when He offered up Himself." One who must sacrifice daily could never actually meet the need of our souls, for the daily repetition only bears witness that the need has not been met. The first part of the verse then speaks strictly of the Aaronic priesthood, under which order the priest must offer both "for his own sins, and then for the people's." The concluding phrase is the blessed contrast seen in the Lord Jesus. His sacrifice is perfectly completed: "this He did once when He offered up Himself." The eternity of His Person gives eternal value to His blessed work. In this the believer has rest. "For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated (or perfected) for evermore." Here is an added testimony as to the weakness of law: it appointed men who have infirmity as high priests. A system in the hands of failing creatures must be a failing system. But "the Son" is again seen in beautiful contrast: in resurrection, having accomplished propitiation, He is perfected forever. Indeed, in life on earth, He has proven Himself without infirmity, and now in resurrection as superior to death, - perfect in every respect as High Priest forever.

Chapter 8

8: 1-5: Christ, high priest in the heavenly sanctuary

Verses 1-2: The reality of his ministry

Verses 3 – 5: The typical foreshadowing of His ministry

8: 6-13 The satisfactory nature of the new covenant

Verses 6-9: The limitations of the old covenant

Verses 10-13 The satisfactory nature of the new covenant

"Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: we have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens: a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." Another contrast now appears in ch. 8 between Aaron and Christ: not only is the Priest Himself of a higher and perfect character, but the ministry He introduces is "more excellent" than that of Aaron (see verse 6). But the first verse would focus our attention upon "such an High Priest," exalted to the highest possible place of glory. For if He is indeed "a minister," He is more than that - the Object of fullest worship and adoration. But being "a minister of the sanctuary (or of the holy places) and of the true tabernacle," His ministry is of universal character, eternal, purely and fully of God. The earthly tabernacle was but a faint picture of this, for though God's pattern was followed with utmost care, it was yet actually the work of men's hands, its ministry therefore temporary. For the tabernacle is symbolic of the universe. The inner sanctuary typifies Heaven itself, the ark therein a type of the throne of God. The outer sanctuary would indicate Israel, the priestly nation, as in the millennium, in closest outward relationship to God. The court would speak of the rest of creation. Actually, in the coming day, all of creation will be affected by the High Priestly work of the Lord Jesus, but its character is Heavenly, for He Himself has entered the "Holiest of all," now in the presence of God for us. This is a great, universal ministry, therefore, and not one confined to one nation under heaven.

But in verse 3, a comparison is again noted: "For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this Man have somewhat also to offer." Since this is the necessary character of a priest, then certainly this High Priest must have an offering to present to God. In this case, the apostle does not speak of His offering Himself up in death, but of a present offering. "For if He were on earth, He should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law." Here again is contrast. He could not be an official priest of an earthly sanctuary, for this was confined to the line of Aaron. His official priesthood now is far above this. Note that the verse does not say that He was not a priest on earth; "but if He were on earth He should not be a priest." His present priesthood has no place now on earth, for He is officially High Priest now. As we have seen, in moral character He always was a Priest, but not officially on earth at all. Similarly, even on earth He was actually

King of Israel; but He will not officially take His throne as such until a yet future day. These distinctions ought to give no difficulty.

Priests on earth however, who are linked with Israel's legal system, "serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith He, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount." The word "example" here may be rightly translated "representation." Moses was given no light or indifferent task. He was not allowed in one iota to change the pattern God gave him, however the children of Israel might have felt about it or considered that some things might be improved upon in their eyes. This was to represent heavenly things, and only God could be depended on to give instructions. How solemn a word for the church today also, as regards true order according to God. Sad indeed that in too many cases man's thoughts have been allowed to qualify and alter the truth of God concerning the order of the church. This is a gross insult to God, and a false representation of His mind and will.

But besides representation the legal system was a "shadow." There was no solid substance in it: this is found only in Christ. The actual substance is heavenly, and the shadow of this was cast on earth, in anticipation of the substance.

"But now hath He obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises." His ministry is superior because He is the Mediator of a superior covenant, which is founded upon superior promises. Indeed, the promise to Abraham was long before the law. Moreover, it was an unconditional promise as to Abraham and his seed, while the promise given to Moses was conditional upon the obedience of the people. How vastly inferior this was, for it could introduce no blessing at all. But the new covenant is the actual fulfilment of the magnificent promise to Abraham, which really manifests the heart of God, and the sufficiency of God, - He Himself accomplishing all blessing, with nothing dependent upon the energy or virtue of man. How much sweeter therefore, how much stronger, how much more full of blessing is the ministry of our Lord, the great Mediator of the new covenant.

Not that the new covenant is addressed to Christians, no more than was the Old. Both are definitely Jewish. This is seen clearly in verses 7 to 10. Nevertheless, though we are not therefore under a covenant in any respect, yet the blessings of the new covenant are ministered to Christians by pure grace, through Him Who is Mediator of the new covenant. This is grace, the branches of blessing spreading out over the wall of Jewish separation, and reaching Gentiles, who

were not the subjects of promise, nor ever in any covenant relationship with God.

"For if the first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, He saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord." The first covenant was not faultless, because it could procure no blessing for those who broke it; and of course those to whom it was given proved themselves far from faultless. Consequently, there was ample room for, and necessity of a new covenant. Observe that verse 8 says, "finding fault with them," not with the covenant.

The apostle quotes from Jeremiah 31, and of course it is plain that the new covenant was there promised exclusively to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Both are mentioned because of the division of the ten tribes from the two in Rehoboam's time. No tribe will be excluded from the new covenant: in that order of things the division will be Divinely healed. And the terms of the covenant must be in contrast to the terms of the former one, given when God led them out of Egypt. Note the reference here to God's compassionate mercy in liberating them from Egypt, a work altogether of sovereign power and grace, in the face of which Israel yet had the ignorant boldness to choose a covenant of law! They required more than this experience to convince them that the mercy of God was their only source of blessing; and the nation has not learned it yet. But they certainly "continued not" in the first covenant, and God has "regarded them not." This will be so until they cease "going about to establish their own righteousness," and abandon themselves to the mercy of God.

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." How vastly different are the terms of this covenant from those of the old. There is no condition whatever here, that is, nothing based upon the fulfilment of human responsibility. No requirement is stipulated at all as regards Israel: it is entirely a matter of God alone fulfilling the terms. Israel has proven that she is utterly without ability to present to God anything that could possibly deserve His favour; and therefore if she is to be favoured, it must be

entirely on the ground of God's work. Of course, it is necessary that she be brought down to first acknowledge her utter destitution and helplessness before she will submit to this great and sovereign grace: only thus will she be in a state to give the entire glory to God.

Putting His laws into their minds and writing them in their hearts is a miracle of mercy. Does it not plainly speak of the new birth, a complete changing of the heart in true repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Nothing short of this will do for Israel, and it is just as necessary for every soul of man today. "Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John 3:3). It is the goodness of God that leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4), and it is by the Word of God that new life is given (1 Pet. 1:23).

This will be true of "all Israel" in the millennial age. The Gospel will not be preached among them, for all shall know the Lord. How mighty a work of Divine grace in that stubborn nation, so long dealt with in chastisement and affliction before being broken and blessed. Isaiah 66:8 prophesies of the wonder of this great work: "Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children." Such is the blessed work of God within the soul. Verse 10 however also speaks of the actual outward acts of disobedience, and shows that Divine mercy would be required to dismiss these. "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." How God could righteously show this mercy is not here mentioned, but chapters 9 and 10 dwell upon the greatness of the public work that must be done for this, - that is, the wondrous sacrifice of Christ.

"In that He saith, A new covenant, He hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." The legal covenant, not having in it the capacity to endure the stress of man's condition, must be replaced by that which endures. The new covenant necessarily renders the first old, and it will never be revived. The new is not merely a method of patching the old: the old must be entirely discarded. And the new will give place to nothing else: it is perpetually new.

Chapter 9

9:1-10 The typical nature of the old covenant

Verses 1-5: The ordinances of the sanctuary under the old covenant

Verses 6 – 10: The sacrifices of the old covenant

9: 11-14 Reality under the new covenant

Verses 11-12: The essence of the reality

Verses 13-14: The meaning of the reality

9: 15-22: The new covenant sealed by Christ's blood

Verses 15-17: Christ's death a necessity

Verses 18-22: The necessity of Christ's death foreshadowed by the law

9: 23-24: The better sanctuary of the new covenant

Verse 23a: The Mosaic tabernacle purged with animal sacrifices

Verses 23b – 24: The heavenly tabernacle purged with better sacrifices

9: 25 – 10:4: The better sacrifice of the new covenant

9:25-28: Christ's sacrifice is final

10: 1-4: Levitical sacrifices imperfect and repeatable

Chapters 9 and 10 form a wonderful climax in the orderly presentation of the truth in this epistle: If according to the new covenant, a man must be morally fitted for the presence of God by means of the new birth, as we have seen, yet the way into Gods presence, the holiest of all, must also be clearly made manifest. These chapters admirably and fully deal with this grand subject.

And first, from verse 1 to 10, the service of the tabernacle is summarized for us, for its typical significance is of deepest importance in this matter. A study of the

details of these things in Exodus and Leviticus would greatly repay the godly reader. "Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of Divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread: which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the holiest of all: which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat; of which we cannot now speak particularly."

The details are not to be dwelt upon here, but we are intended to closely observe the distinction between the two holy places, the sanctuary and the holiest of all. Indeed, emphasis is put strikingly upon the holiest of all; for in the outer sanctuary the candlestick was of pure gold, the table of showbread was overlaid with gold, yet the gold is not mentioned in connection with these, while it is mentioned three times in verse 4, in connection with the holiest. Moreover, the incense altar, which was in the outer sanctuary, is not mentioned at all. It was also overlaid with gold. Perhaps the reason for this is that under law there had been no true, real worship, of which the incense altar would speak. Gold is typical of the glory of God, and though this was involved in Judaism, yet His glory could not in any full measure be revealed under law and its shadows. Thus the Spirit of God would direct our attention to the greater revelation connected with the holiest. This is typical of Heaven itself, while the outer sanctuary is typical of the sphere of Judaism and the earthly priesthood.

This is intimated in the following verses: "Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service. But into the second went the High Priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: the Holy Ghost this signifying that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing." Judaistic priests had access at all times into the first sanctuary: it was the sphere of their common service as the sons of Aaron. But none of the common priests were allowed at any time in the holiest of all.

The High Priest alone on the great day of atonement each year was allowed in, in order to sprinkle the blood of the sin offering before and on the mercy - seat. The veil remained always between the two sanctuaries, keeping the holiest of all in constant darkness.

What a lesson for Israel! Here was continual testimony to the fact that there was a sphere into which Judaism could give no free access. God Himself remained in

the thick darkness. Yet the entrance of the High Priest each year was an indication that God had not precluded the possibility of man's entrance there; while at the same time the High Priest is a striking type of the Lord Jesus - the Man Christ Jesus, Mediator between God and men. But the way into the holiest could not be made manifest in connection with the first tabernacle, that is, under the legal system: the system itself pointed to something beyond itself. It was "a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience, which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation."

Such gifts and sacrifices left the conscience still unpurged. Their actual value lay only in the fact that they typified a better sacrifice than these. Meats and drinks too were but typical of the food and refreshment of the sacrifice of Christ - both for God and for the believer. Divers washings and carnal ordinances were typical of the application of the truth of Christ to the soul, in cleansing and sustaining power. Such things, being typical, were of course temporary, - imposed only until the time of reformation, when God would set things in proper relationship and perspective, introducing a change to end all changes.

"But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building: neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." Blessed fulfilment of all these types! Christ is come, "an High Priest of good things to come." These good things have of course not yet been secured by the nation Israel, as they will be; though the church is infinitely blessed in anticipation of that day, by her reception of Christ, with all the blessings His Priesthood brings. The greater and more perfect tabernacle is that which is eternal in contrast to the earthly system of Judaism committed to men's hands: it would speak of the universe as in the counsels of God, - God's eternal building.

Verse 12 speaks of the eternal character of His work, in contrast to the repeated sacrifices of the Old Testament. By the blood of goats and calves the high priest in Israel had title to enter into the holiest on the great day of atonement; but this gave no title to remain in, and the same sacrifice must be repeated each year. But Christ, by His own blood, because of its eternal value, had title to enter into Heaven "once," having obtained eternal redemption for us." The work of the priest in Israel was always unfinished: that of Christ was perfect and complete in every respect, and God has received Him in perpetuity in His own holy presence, the holiest of all.

In the type, the high priest brought with him the blood of the sin offering into the holiest, and sprinkled it before the mercy - seat, and upon it. This was necessary, in order to illustrate the fact that it was "by blood" that he had title there. It is of course evident that the actual material blood of Christ was not brought by Him into Heaven. Not "with blood;" but "by His own blood He entered in." That is, the eternal value of His sacrifice gave title to His entering Heaven as Redeemer and High Priest of His people.

"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" These formal ordinances accomplished a formal result. "The purifying of the flesh" was merely an outward, public setting apart from the sin for which the sacrifice was offered. The very fact of the sacrifice was a public condemnation of the sin; and the offerer thereby linked himself with the repudiation of the sin, publicly. But there was no vital, eternal value in it.

But a sacrifice of such vital, eternal character as that of the Lord of Glory, must necessarily have vital, eternal results. This is involved strikingly in the expression, "by the eternal Spirit." His was not a sacrifice by formal appointment, but by the voluntary, Divine energy of the Spirit of God. Nor are we to narrow our thoughts so as to think of "the blood of Christ" as merely the material blood which was shed, but rather to consider its deep, precious significance. For it is the sign of His life given up in sacrifice, - offered to God, whose heart takes unutterable delight in the infinite value of this. Well may Peter speak of "the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:19).

Another matter of consequence is to be observed here. The actual offering of Christ through the eternal Spirit to God is seen in His baptism by John the Baptist, when the Spirit descended upon Him, and the Father's voice bore witness to His pleasure in Him. His baptism was the very figure of the death to which He pledged Himself. But offering Himself then to God, His utter devotion eventually culminated in His being "offered up" at Calvary, His blood shed for us. How fully and blessedly such a sacrifice purges the conscience from dead works (an effect vital and permanent), to energize the soul to serve the living God!

"And for this cause He is the Mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal

inheritance." Having offered a sacrifice of eternal value, He is therefore necessarily the Mediator of the covenant that displaces the temporary one. Moreover, His death fulfills that which the old covenant demanded: it has satisfied the judgment of God against those sins which the old covenant brought to light. His death therefore is in a very real sense the end of the old covenant. Nothing in the old covenant could possibly provide redemption in regard to the sins it exposed; but it demanded death. Its claims have been met in the death of Christ, and its authority set aside by this great Mediator. He has triumphed in resurrection - a new and eternal condition, which involves a new covenant and introduces the "promise of eternal inheritance."

How much greater is this than anything that Israel has as yet inherited? Again and again has God demonstrated to them that their possession of the land of Israel is far from permanent. Law could not secure it to them. Nor, now that many of them have returned there, will all their political diplomacy and military prowess be sufficient to hold what they have gained. They will yet be more violently oppressed than ever before, their land torn from their hands. But God has decreed that under the new covenant Israel will dwell in peace, in full possession of their inheritance, given them by God's sovereign intervention in power and grace. Above this however, the church has her eternal inheritance "in Christ" and "in the heavenlies," and this perfectly secure now. This is consistent with the New covenant, but not actually a part of it, for we are not in any sense under a covenant, however rightly and greatly we may enjoy the benefits of it.

It is to be remarked also that "covenant" and "testament" are actually the same Greek word, translated in either way. This will give more clear understanding as regards what follows: "For where a testament is, there must be also the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, and water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover, he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood: and without the shedding of blood is no remission."

How perfectly this illustrates the fact of God's foreknowledge that blessing for Israel under the law was impossible, that is blessing promised by the testament of law. The blood, shed at that time, and sprinkled so profusely, really only insisted upon the necessity of death; and being a conditional testament, that is, its blessings conditional upon the obedience of the people to law, then blessing

under it was hopeless. Indeed, disobedience demanded the shedding of blood, but blood was shed in the very giving of the law and its ordinances, before ever it brought guilt to light. And every service of the sanctuary was a continual reminder that blood must be shed: there could be no remission without it. Even formal remission, applicable to a public, temporary system of things, demanded the blood of an animal. What then must eternal remission require? The old testament required death, and so must the new. And the new is entirely a testament of Divine character, expressing the will of God. How admirable the truth here: in order to come into force, the death of the testator must take place.

But while law could demand death, it could not provide the death of the great Testator: indeed it only affirmed Him to be the living God, and man rightly under the sentence of death. All was hopeless under this testament. But how marvellous therefore is the new testament, full of unconditional blessing for confessed sinners, because it provides in pure grace the amazing incarnation and matchless death of the Testator Himself, on their behalf. This is what gives it eternal force and value. Only by the great mystery of incarnation - God's being made manifest in flesh - could this wonderful death have taken place, opening the floodgates of Heaven's blessing to unworthy sinners. The New Testament has fullest force on this grand basis of Divine grace. Sad to say, of course, Israel has today refused such grace, and there can be no application of this to that nation until they bow their hearts to acknowledge this blessed Testator who died for them. Meanwhile others, who have received Him, reap the benefits of this testament which was not actually made for them at all, - and thus grace is magnified.

"It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these." Such purification was strictly formal, that is the patterns were purified: all was external. The pattern itself accomplished no actual result, no more than a dress pattern could substitute for the dress itself. But the pattern must illustrate in its measure the form the dress is to take. So the heavenly things must be purified with a sacrifice of vital character, not formal.

"For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." He is not a formal priest of the line of Aaron performing the daily ritual of an earthly tabernacle, but infinitely above this. He has entered into Heaven itself, the true "Holy of holies," in gracious mediation on behalf of His redeemed people.

"Nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year, with the blood of others; for then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world; but now once in the end of the age hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." Even a casual reader of Hebrews ought not to fail to observe the apostle's insistence upon the fact of Christ's being sufficient and final, in contrast to the repeated offerings of the Old Testament, specifically the sin offering on the great day of atonement. If His sacrifice were comparable to these, then He must offer Himself repeatedly, and with no hope of cessation? But as Hebrew's has so fully illustrated, since He is in Person infinite, therefore His one sacrifice has infinite value, not limited by the greatness of man's sin, nor by the element of time, - that is by the question of whether sins were committed before or after the offering of Himself: its value is all-sufficient. It is the perfect basis for the complete putting away of sin from under Heaven, as will be known in the eternal state; and by it the sins of believers are now put away, through faith in this blessed sacrifice: faith in this way anticipates eternity.

Another expression here must be noticed: "once in the end of the age hath He appeared." The age here is of course the probationary age of Judaism, which made nothing perfect. When all else was proven hopeless, the Great Creator Himself became Saviour, in one great work of infinite perfection and completeness. Blessed Redeemer indeed! Blessed grace that offered no less than Himself!

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment, so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Here is another viewpoint also involved, that since man is appointed to die only once, on account of sin, after which he has an appointment to give an account of his sins, therefore Christ died once, offering Himself for sins, that judgment might be averted for "many," that is believers, for He Himself has borne this judgment fully for them. If it is true that He died for all, yet to "bear the sins of many" is limited to those who in faith receive Him. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name" (John 1:12). Thus such grace is available to "all," but applicable only to "many."

The many are of course "them that look for Him." Every true child of God looks for the Lord Jesus to eventually take His rightful place of authority and glory in the universe. All may not have clear thoughts as regards the truth of the coming of the Lord, but all "look for Him." To these He shall appear the second time, apart entirely from any raising of the question of sin. This has been settled long

before, and cannot be raised again. Judgment is past, and therefore His coming will be "unto salvation," that is, complete salvation bodily, the believer delivered entirely from the very presence of sin. Wonderful prospect indeed! This is the first part of the second coming, for here He appears only to believers, while later "every eye shall see Him," when He must mete out judgment to those who have refused His blessed mercy.

The Covenants of the Sacred Scripture

Covenant and Significance

Eternal covenant Heb 13:20

The redemptive covenant before time began, between the Father and the Son. By this covenant we have eternal redemption, an eternal peace from the 'God of peace,' through the death and resurrection of the Son.

Edenic covenant Gen 1:26-28

The creative covenant between the Triune God, as the first party (Gen 1:26), and newly created man, as the second party, governing man's creation and life in Edenic innocence. It regulated man's dominion and subjugation of the earth, and presented a simple test of obedience. The penalty was death.

Adamic covenant Gen 3:14-19

The covenant conditioning fallen man's life on the earth. Satan's tool (the serpent) was cursed (Gen 3:14); the first promise of the Redeemer was given (3:15); women's status was altered (3:16); the earth was cursed (3:17-19); physical and spiritual death resulted (3:19).

Noahic covenant Gen 8:20-9:6

The covenant of human government. Man is to govern his fellowmen for God, indicated by the institution of capital punishment as the supreme judicial power of the state (Gen 9:5-6). Other features included the promise of redemption through the line of Shem (9:26).

Abrahamic covenant Gen 12:1-3; confirmed, 3:14-17; 15:1-7; 17:1-8

The covenant of promise. Abraham's posterity was to be made a great nation. In him (through Christ) all the families of the earth were to be blessed (Gal 16; Jn 8:56-58).

Mosaic covenant Ex 20:1-31:18

The legal covenant, given solely to Israel. It consisted of the commandments (Ex 20:1-26); the judgments (social) - (Ex 21:1;24:11) and the ordinances (religious); (Ex 24:12 - 31:18); also called the law. It was a conditional covenant of works, a ministry of 'condemnation' and 'death' (2 Cor 3:7-9), designed to lead the transgressor (convicted thereby as a sinner) to Christ.

Palestinian covenant Deut 30:1-10

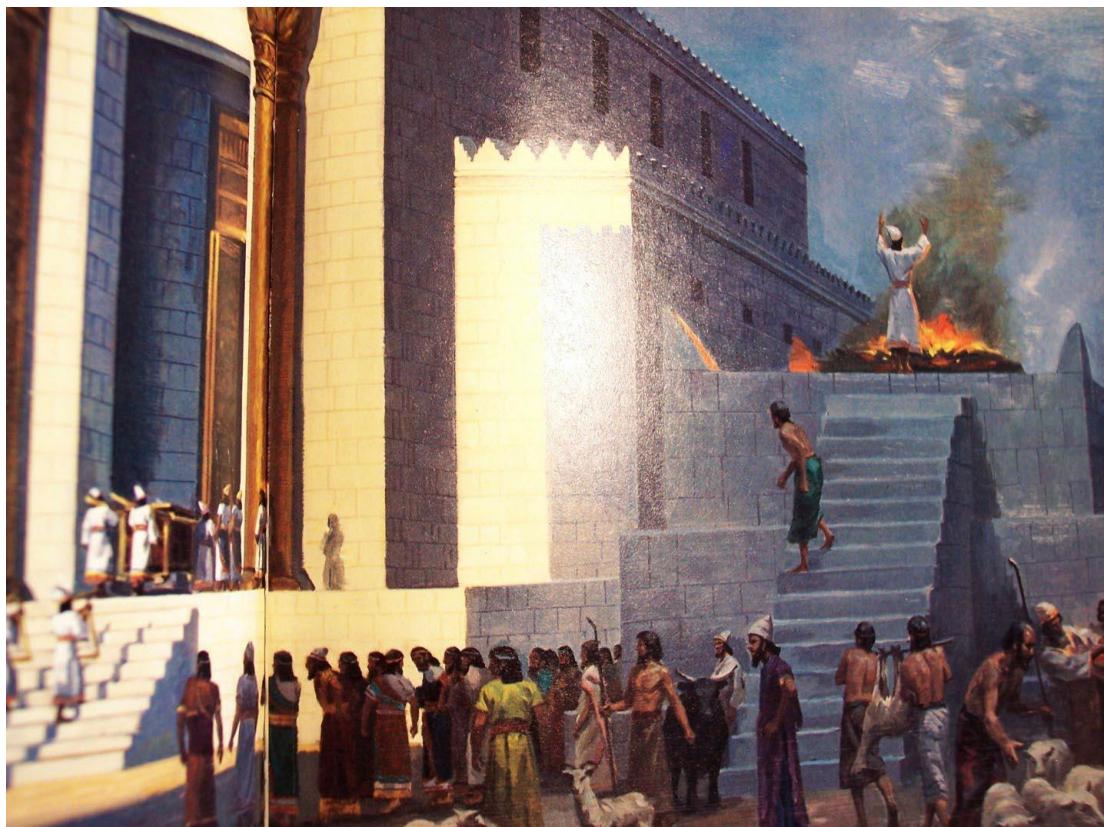
The covenant regulating Israel's tenure of the land of Canaan. Its prophetic features include dispersion for disobedience (Deut 30:1), future repentance while in dispersion (30:2), the Lord's return (30:3), the restoration (30:4-5), national conversion (3:6), judgment of Israel's foes (30:7), national prosperity (30:9). Its blessings are conditioned upon obedience (30:8, 10), but fulfillment is guaranteed by the new covenant.

Davidic covenant 2 Sam 7:4-17; 1 Chr 17:4-15

The kingdom covenant regulating the temporal and eternal rule of David's posterity. It secures in perpetuity a Davidic 'house' or line, a throne, and a kingdom. It was confirmed by divine oath in Ps 89:30-37 and renewed to Mary in Lk 1:31-33. It is fulfilled in Christ as the world's Saviour and Israel's coming King (Acts 1:6; Rev 19:16; 20:4-6).

New covenant Jer 31:31-33; Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; Heb 8:8-12

The covenant of unconditional blessing based upon the finished redemption of Christ. It secures blessing for the church, flowing from the Abrahamic covenant (Gal 3:13-20), and secures all covenant blessings to converted Israel, including those of the Abrahamic, Palestinian, and Davidic covenants. This covenant is unconditional, final and irreversible.



A stone altar

Chapter 10

10: 5-10 The new covenant based on Christ's perfect sacrifice

Verses 5-7: Christ's perfect sacrifice foretold

Verses 8-10: Christ's perfect sacrifice annuls the old order

10:11-14: The new covenant superior because of Christ's present position

Verse 11: The inferior position and ministry of the Levitical priests

Verses 12-14: The superior position and work of Christ

10: 15-18: The new covenant is superior because of the finality of Christ's sacrifice

Verses 15-17: The witness of the Spirit

Verse 18: A summary statement

10: 19-25: Appeal to a life of faith

Verses 19:22: The basis of the appeal

Verses 23-25: The further appeal

10:26-31: Warning against lapse into Judaism

Verses 26-29: The problem of presumptuous sinning

Verses 30-31: The punishment

10: 32-39: A call to patient faith

Verses 32-34: The call to remember their early faith

Verses 35-39: The call to continue in patient faith.

The attentive reader cannot but notice the thoroughness with which this subject is treated in these chapters. It is a matter of profound importance, basic as regards any true knowledge of God, and as to approaching the presence of God. Law could not give any such revelation. "For the law, having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins."

A shadow is simply an evidence of something substantial. Verse 34 of our chapter speaks of the "better and enduring substance." This of course is what the law foreshadowed: the two were certainly not one and the same, nor is the shadow of any strength whatever to the substance. The sacrifices provided under law were but part of the shadow: they could never accomplish the redemption of which they were typical; and those who approached on that basis could find no real purging of conscience, no standing in perfection before God. For it should be evident that the sacrifice must be perfection itself if it is to bring perfection of blessing. And if it has done so, then the recipients of it "have no more conscience of sins:" a perfect sacrifice is complete in reference to accomplishing the purging of guilt, and it makes perfect those who approach God on this basis. "But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." The repetition of the offering only proved that the question of sins was not yet settled. Like a great debt owed, it was never reduced by the paying of the

interest year by year. Each year thus only brought to remembrance the fact that sins had not yet actually been taken away. The blood of animals could not possibly accomplish such a result.

"Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I am come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do Thy will, O God." This quotation is from Psalm 40, rightly called "the burnt offering Psalm." The Old Testament itself bore clearest witness to the fact that animal sacrifices were of no real value in the eyes of God, and this Psalm is as the light breaking through the mist to declare that at least Someone would take the place of all such offerings. "A body hast Thou prepared Me" is the way in which the Spirit of God interprets His own expression in the Psalm, "ears hast Thou digged for Me." Does this not rightly imply that He would take the lowly place of the Servant, utterly obedient to the Father's will, ears opened to hear His Word? The same is implied in His body prepared for Him. Rather than in the form of God commanding and ordering all things according to His own will, He takes the form of a Servant, assuming the limitation of a human body, in complete subjection to the will of God. On earth, where not one had actually done the will of God, here was One Who came for that purpose, to accomplish that will in perfection. Blessed, wondrous sight! No doubt the "body prepared" is also an advance upon the thought of "ears digged," showing that the Psalmist's expression could be fulfilled only by means of incarnation.

But the apostle in verses 8 and 9 repeats this quotation with the object of showing that "the first" must be taken away. in order that "the second" be established. The law itself bore witness to the fact that its own terms were unsatisfactory, and therefore that it must be set aside in favor of One who would do the will of God.

"By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Sacrifices under law sanctified momentarily, that is outwardly; but of permanent value it gave none. The will of God accomplished by the offering of the Lord Jesus, brings with it a permanent sanctification, a setting apart to God of every redeemed soul, for eternity. This sanctification is positional, that is it sets the believer in a separated position, as having recognized that great public sacrifice which separates between believers and unbelievers publicly. "The sanctification of the Spirit" applies of course to all believers also. but this involves the Spirit's inward work in souls as separating them from those who have not the Spirit. This is internal, the former external.

"And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins, forever sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." The fact that the priests in Israel stood continually in performing an unending round of service, indicated that their work was never done. The tabernacle had no seat, except the mercy seat in the holiest of all, which could never be approached except by the high priest once each year, to sprinkle blood upon it. Is all this ritual not a designed lesson to mankind that the most unwearingly labour could never accomplish the least iota of eternal blessing.

But the entire question is answered in marvellous fullness and perfection by the one sacrifice of our holy Lord, God's great High Priest. Having accomplished expiation for sins in this one great work, He sits down in perpetuity on the right hand of God, in the holiest of all, upon the very throne which He had propitiated, having perfectly done the will of God.

The perfection in verse 14 is explained for us clearly. It is certainly not perfection in a man's moral character of which the apostle speaks, but perfection of blessing accomplished on behalf of those who are sanctified, that is, every believer. The sacrifice being perfect, has perfect results, giving a position of perfection to the believer. The same work that sanctifies or sets apart, is the work that provides perfection for all who are sanctified.

"Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us, for after that He had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." We have first seen the will of God, followed by the work of the Son, and now in close connection is the witness of the Spirit. Let us observe however that it is not the witness within the believer that is here spoken of. 1 John 5:10 does speak of the Spirit of God within the believer witnessing to his possession of eternal life. But here in Hebrews 10 the witness of the Spirit is rather the Old Testament Scripture (Jeremiah 31) which had been long before dictated by the Spirit of God and therefore of course a conclusive witness to the Jew. Under the terms of this covenant, the Spirit of God had pledged all inward work in men's hearts and minds (that of the new birth), but also a complete remission of sins. This being so, then the Old Testament itself indicated that offerings for sin would cease. This is inescapable. Had the Jews even considered so evident a fact laid down in their own Scriptures?

It may be remarked also that God in Divine government put an end to Israel's offerings perforce, following the sacrifice of Christ; for the Jews lost their city in A.D. 70, and have never had possession of the temple area of Jerusalem until very recently (June, 1967). They well know that this is the only place in which their sacrifices are allowed to be offered; and we may well wonder how soon the intensity of their desire to restore their worship of old will overcome their fear of Arab and world pressures, to such an extent as to replace the present "Dome of the Rock" with a Jewish temple. But such an attempt will be of short-lived duration: for idolatry will supplant the worship of Jehovah, and the Great tribulation fall in dreadful ferocity upon the unhappy nation. Later on, when they are restored to blessing in the millennium, through the gracious intervention of their own Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, God will order again the sacrificing of animals, as Ezekiel shows us, but not "for sins." They will be rather a remembrance of the perfect sacrifice of Christ, and of sins fully put away (Ez. 40:39.43; 43:18-27).

The question of sin now settled, verse 19 proceeds to encourage the believer in those privileges proper to him. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." How infinitely marvellous a contrast to Judaism! For law sternly forbade entry into the holiest. God dwelt in thick darkness, and none dare approach. But the saint of God today is called to do so with calm, holy boldness, having fullest confidence in the blood of Jesus, which gives perfect title there, in the immediate presence of God.

The way into the holiest is both "new," accomplished by the death of Christ, and "living," that is not in any sense formal, but vital and eternal. Moreover, He has consecrated it: no service of consecration is left to man at all. The veil, separating between the two holy places is here interpreted for us, "that is to say, His flesh." His perfect Manhood was actually an absolute barrier to man's entrance into God's presence, for in that blessed Manhood of Christ God had demonstrated that only perfection was satisfactory to Him. But the death of Christ - the rending of the veil from the top to bottom - is the wondrous work that opens the way into God's presence for sinners.

But He is also a High Priest over the house of God, One Whose mediation is perfection itself, and because of Whom the believer is gladly welcomed. Thus we observe a threefold cord of assured blessing to the believer, all centred in the

Person and work of the Lord Jesus, - the blood, the rent veil, and the High Priest. We have before seen too that not only does He have authority over God's house: He is Son over His house.

Such being the case, it is but right that we should draw near, but certainly with a true heart. How could we dare stoop to deceit in connection with those things in which God's perfect truth and love have been so clearly manifested for our sake? "Full assurance of faith" too is to be our attitude in drawing near, - no unholy familiarity or unseemly forwardness, yet no terror or shrinking; rather a calm, holy decision of faith. The "heart sprinkled from an evil conscience" would speak of the Word of God having application to the heart and conscience by the new birth. It is the sprinkling spoken of in Ezekiel 36:25. "Our bodies washed with pure water" on the other hand would speak of the effects of that new birth in the outward character of the believer. The one therefore is the internal change, the other external, but by the power of the same water, the Word of God. This latter is the "bath" that every believer receives at new birth. Compare John 13:10. "He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." This washing must be distinguished from cleansing by blood, which is cleansing from the guilt of sins; for the washing of water is cleansing morally from the power of sin, that is, the effect upon the soul, both internal and external.

The first (and most important) exhortation therefore is to draw near to God. But there is more to follow: "Let us hold fast the confession of our faith (or hope) without wavering: (for He is faithful that promised)." If we have been given a solid basis for drawing near to God, to give up such a position would be impossible. Hebrew professors of Christianity were however exposed to particularly serious tests of their reality, and if the false turned back, this could but be expected; but such exhortations as this verse would strengthen those who were true in heart yet possibly shaken on account of the apostasy of some. "For He is faithful that promised." Blessed rock of certainty for the believer!

But verse 24 proceeds to more positive, active goodness. "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." Passive submission is one thing, and needful too, but we must not content ourselves with this. True, proper activity should stem from this, a genuine concern for the blessing of others with whom God has put us in contact. Such consideration for one another is the normal fruit of Christianity. Provoking unto love and good works is done by showing such character cheerfully in our own lives, and encouraging others in such things. But let us notice that good works are not considered until after the great work of the Lord Jesus is seen to be the only resting place of the soul, the

only real foundation of blessing. Thereafter, good works have their true, real value, as a proper result of the knowledge of eternal salvation.

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more as ye see the Day approaching." If there is decline in the fresh, honest energy of drawing near to God, a corresponding laxity will soon appear in the desire for the gathering together of the saints. How sad that this is such a tendency in a world that supplies every inducement to forget God. One may feel himself strong enough spiritually without the need of constant gathering in fellowship with the people of God: but this very feeling is a sad sign of spiritual weakness, for which he deeply needs such assembling to the Name of the Lord. Indeed, if he is strong, he should use his strength for the encouragement of others. Or if one should give in to his own feelings of discouragement because of lack of outward public blessing, he is only encouraging the discontent and selfishness of his own heart and of others. The Lord preserve us in His mercy, to hold fast that which He has given us, and not to give up because of the trial of faith. Indeed, let us go further, and diligently exhort one another in this regard, and more urgently as we see the Day approaching. How should we feel if the Lord should come immediately after we had decided to give up a wholehearted walk with Him in fellowship with saints?

The apostle here puts diligent faithfulness in contrast to apostasy. For verse 26 is the wilful rejection of the Christ who was once acknowledged. "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite into the Spirit of grace?"

This is no case of a weak believer giving way to sinful conduct, for in such a case there is a restoring remedy. Compare James 5:19, 20; Galatians 6:1; 1 John 2:1. But here there is no remedy. The greatness of the Person of Christ and the perfection of His sacrifices have been here discussed in wonderful fulness. The willful sin of verse 26 is therefore the cold, deliberate rejection of this marvelous revelation of God, in the very face of having been intellectually enlightened. Notice, it is after receiving the knowledge of the truth, - not receiving the truth itself, or "the love of the truth," as is expressed in 2 Thessalonians 2. Some Jews who had professed Christianity were already revolting against it. In acknowledging it, they were admitting the necessity for a sacrifice to take away

sins. Now in refusing it, they were choosing a position where there was no sacrifice for sins whatever. How dreadfully hopeless! Positive, certain judgment was the only alternative, fiery indignation, which should devour the adversaries. For in such a stand they became the callous adversaries of the God of Israel.

Moses' law, with which the Jews were familiar, sternly demanded death in the case of any who rebelled against it, when the case was established by competent witness. But the revelation of God's glory in the Person of His Son infinitely transcends God's speaking by the law of Moses. If the judgment under law is so severe, then the far greater enormity of the crime against the Son of God demands a far greater judgment. Three solemn charges are brought against the apostate; first, his treading underfoot the Son of God. This is similar to Ch. 6:6. It is cold contempt for the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is God manifest in flesh. How dreadful an insult to the Eternal God! Secondly, the blood of Christ he treats as unholy, despite the fact that God's covenants with Israel demanded shedding of blood. Thus if the Son of God Personally is cast aside, so is His great work of redemption. Such a man plainly has never been born again, yet is said to have been "sanctified" by the blood of the covenant. Taking a public stand with Christians, he had been publicly set apart by the acknowledgment of the virtue of the blood of Christ. But his heart had not actually been reached: all was merely on the surface.

Thirdly, "the Spirit of grace" is despised. The Spirit of God revealing the marvelous grace of God in the present dispensation, attending this with clearest demonstration for Israel, with miracles and signs, has been deliberately insulted with haughty contempt. This compares with the sin against the Holy Ghost, which shall never be forgiven (Mark 3:28-30).

In every nation under heaven, brazen contempt for a dignity is counted a grossly criminal offence, and the higher the dignity, the more grave the crime. Certainly then such daring insolence against the eternal God will reap a terrible punishment. "For we know Him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

But because God is patient, and no dire consequences of such evil are immediately seen, men are emboldened in rebellion. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11). Thus the test is complete. The patience of God allows time to prove fully the utter absence of faith in such painful cases; and when the judgment does at last come, it will be clearly seen to be absolutely and unquestionably just. Moreover, these things are so intensely serious that the

judgment is not to be entrusted to human hands, nor even to angels: it is vengeance directly from the hand of the all wise and righteous God. Fearful indeed His vengeance at last manifested after years of patient grace so despised by man's proud unbelief!

"But call to remembrance the former days, in which after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions: partly whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used." This exhortation would have true effect upon those souls who were real: they could not lightly overthrow the reality of what they had suffered for the Lord's sake in their first stand for Him, and for identifying themselves with the saints who were suffering. Only a callous, untrue heart could renounce all this.

For verse 33 we quote a more exact translation: "For ye sympathized with those in bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing that ye have for yourselves a better and an enduring substance" (Numerical Bible). Such an attitude was fully true of those who had truly received Christ. It was no small matter to have linked themselves with prisoners who suffered for Christ, exposed to the ungodly persecutor who considered himself justified in plundering their possessions because they were commonly held in contempt. But faith could rise above grieving as to temporal loss: they had what was their own, a better and enduring substance. This had given them steadfast firmness, and certainly it was no less real now.

"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." If confidence in the living Cod is cast away, then its character is proven to be extremely deficient, for God Himself has not changed. Persecution tests it, no doubt, and the apostle would strengthen souls to stand by true, living faith. Patient endurance would gain its recompense, for the will of God in reference to any believer is that he should prove through hard experience that his trust is actually in the living God.

"For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Time may drag heavily and seem long when affliction and adversity try the soul, yet it is a mere moment in comparison to eternity; and the coming of the Lord is put before the soul as a constant source of encouragement, comfort, and confidence. Let the saints of God more wholeheartedly expect this and encourage one another in such blessed expectation.

"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." The quotation "the just shall live by faith" is from Habakkuk 2:4, quoted also in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. It is most interesting to observe the differences of emphasis in each case, however, as illustrating the blessed fact that Scripture indulges in no mere repetition. Romans dwells upon the truth of justification, and hence emphasizes "the just." Galatians deals with the subject of living a Christian life, not by works of law, but by faith, and therefore emphasizes "shall live." Now Hebrews emphasizes the means, - "by faith" and in chapter 11 illustrates this beautifully.

But if one should "draw back," that is, if he abandons faith. God can have no pleasure in him. How could God be pleased with one who refuses to trust Him, - a God of perfect truth and goodness.' But there is no possibility of this on the part of any true believer. Some drew back unto perdition, "but we are not of them," says the apostle. Believing to the saving of the soul is in fullest contrast to that type of belief that is merely an outward assent to the truth of Christianity.



*Mud bricks drying in the sun on the shores of the Euphrates, North Syria,
nearby biblical Haran*

Chapter 11

11: 1-3: The superiority pf persevering faith

Verse 1: The definition of persevering faith

Verses 2-3: The accomplishment of persevering faith

11:4-40: Faith that envisioned the promise – Christ (Abel and Enoch)

Verse 4: Abel's sacrifice of faith.

Verses 5-6: Enoch's walk of faith (cf. Gen. 5:23-24)

Noah

Verse 7: Noach's action of faith

Abraham and Sarah

Verses 8-10: Abraham's obedience of faith

Verses 11-12: Sarah's strength of faith.

The reality and hope of faith

Verses 13-15: Its reality

Abraham and Isaac

Verses 17-18: Abraham's severely tested faith

Verse 19: Abraham's uniquely triumphant faith

Isaac, Jacob and Joseph

Verses 20-21: Isaac and Jacob's blessing of faith

Verse 22: Joseph's instructions of faith

Moses in Egypt

Verse 23: His parents' act of faith (cf. Exodus 1:22-2:2)

Verses 24-26: Moses choice of faith

Moses quitting Egypt

Verse 27: Moses' flight of faith (cf. Exodus 2:14-15)

Verses 28-29: Moses' Passover of faith

Joshua and Rahab

Verse 30: Joshua's march of faith

Verse 31: Rahab's hospitality of faith

From Gideon to Samuel and the prophets

Verse 32: Other heroes of faith

Verses 33-34: The exploits

Verses 35-37: Their sufferings

Verse 38: Their elevation

Verses 39-40: The faith of Old Testament saints and ours.

This chapter in itself forms a complete division of the book of Hebrews. If previously the doctrine has been thoroughly laid down that faith is the principle of all actual relationship with God, now Ch. 11 provides from the Old Testament itself numerous examples of positive proof that faith is the one principle that produces real results for God in all ages. It is the experimental proof. And these examples of faith are the more remarkable when we consider that the dispensation of law did not in any way emphasize faith, as does our present dispensation of grace, which indeed may be termed "a dispensation for faith." But though not publicly taught in the Old Testament, yet faith is seen to be the only actual energizing power by which anything for God was accomplished. The Psalms actually are full of declarations of the blessedness of faith, but the law did not declare it as a necessary doctrine. However, there is a power in faith that could not but manifest itself in spite of the legal system.

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." This is not a definition, but shows us something of what faith does. It is that which, to the individual, gives solid substance to things hoped for. It is no mere fanciful imagination, but an honest trust in the living God, by which the things of God are made a definite, clear reality to the heart, and are thus recognized to be more truly substantial than all material substance-for the latter will pass away. Also it has that peculiar power of evidencing to us "things not seen." Faith in the living God is not blind, but the actual opening of the eyes, accepting unquestionable evidence of the reality of unseen, spiritual things.

"For by it the elders obtained a good report." Did legal-minded Jews consider this? It was not rigid law-keeping that clothed with such illustrious beauty the lives or works of the most outstanding Old Testament saints, but a genuine active faith in God. This we shall see in our chapter.

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." It is no problem to the believer to understand creation. Faith, crediting God, sees nothing too hard for Him. Some so-called scientists, who admittedly find no other alternative but evolution, will reject creation on the ground of its seeming to be "incredible," and with amazing credulity follow the theory that the universe has by the merest chance gradually taken shape out of some original, undefined, hazy nothingness! And thus, life, order, growth, instinct, feeling, sound, hearing, sight, odour, smelling, taste, memory, intellect, reason, energy, movement, personality, conscience, motives, spiritual conceptions, besides an infinite variety of material forms, and also of immaterial characteristics, seen in great variety even within one material species, - all this is claimed to proceed out of a nebulous mass of lifeless nonentity! Where in the universe, have they observed one sample of such a principle in operation? Such reasoning is of course grossly unreasonable.

But in the Word of God is majestic power, and this has framed the universe. The details of this God has not told us, nor does Scripture indicate at what time the original creation came into being. The six days of Genesis 1, in which the remodelling of the earth for man is described, reveal what is comparatively recent in earth's history. God has made visible things from things invisible. The atom, from which all matter is formed, (and which He created, Col. 1:16,) is invisible; and the atom itself is formed of smaller, invisible parts. Scientists wonder if even these are again formed by infinitesimal particles, and are dubious if they will ever discover the smallest basic building blocks of matter. At least, the lesson is inescapable, that what is unseen and spiritual is the basis of what is material, and therefore far more important. Faith apprehends this with not the least difficulty.

Verse 3 then connects faith with understanding or wisdom, and in relation to creation. But let us go further: "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he being dead yet speaketh." Observe that this verse connects faith with worship, related to the great truth of redemption. Sin had marred that which God had created without fault. Therefore creation was no basis of worship whatever. Cain ignored the fall, and dared to offer the fruits of

the cursed creation. Abel offered a lamb by the shedding of its blood, a striking type of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, in which the just penalty of sin is faced, and borne. Faith recognizes that this is the only ground of approach to God. Apart from the cross, no worship can be acceptable to Him. How brilliantly is this faith exemplified for us in the case of Abel, and so early in history.

By his sacrifice he obtained witness that he was righteous. His faith acted upon God's revealed will in the matter. Cain, even when reasoned with by God, stubbornly refused any offering but the fruits that witnessed the work of his own hands, and his pride was his own condemnation. But God testified to the value of Abel's gifts: He had respect to that which spoke of the offering of His own Son. Abel therefore, though murdered by Cain, continues to speak throughout all history: and doubtless multitudes have been awakened of God, through this record, to trust God's one sacrifice.

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death: and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." Here faith is connected with a godly walk in separation from an ungodly world, and therefore related to "translation" into the sphere of new creation. Genesis tells us that "Enoch walked with God." Jude further speaks of his faithful prophesying of the Lord's coming and the judgment of the ungodly (Jude 14, 15). He is a striking type of the church of God, which in her proper condition walks in devoted separation to God, bearing faithful witness to the coming of the Lord, and will be suddenly caught up to meet the Lord in the air, not actually seeing death. God confirms His approval of her moral separation by physically separating her from the world before judgment falls. No doubt the witness of Enoch was deeply resented, and it has been suggested that the expression, "was not found" implies that he was sought, possibly with the object of putting him to death. But God intervened: he did not see death at all! Wonderful indeed the testimony of Scripture as regards him: "he pleased God." Who can estimate the marvellous value of this? But let its remark that all of this is the fruit of simple, honest faith.

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." If one does not honestly believe that "God is," then his apparent religious approach to God is thorough hypocrisy. Faith is simply a true recognition of God, and certainly nothing less than this can please God. This is the elementary essential, while the last part of the verse shows the active working of faith, that is, diligently seeking God, which is certainly to be rewarded, in accordance with the faithful nature of God.

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." In this case faith is connected with work as related to judgment. Noah worked because he believed God. The dreadful reality of God's judgment had stirring effect upon his soul. His labour in building the ark, his preaching while doing so, was not prompted by light motives, but by "godly fear." God had spoken, and God would make good His word. Only Noah's house was saved: others despised both the long preaching of Noah and his amazing labors in building the ark. But the weight of popular opinion was only folly in this case: all was swept away in the flood. Note too that by the very building of the ark Noah condemned the world. Its existence was the witness of the flood to come. Just so, the preaching of the Gospel of eternal salvation through the death of Christ, is clearest witness of the condemnation of the world. If there were no judgment, then salvation would be meaningless. The very fact of the Gospel of God's grace is proof that the world is under judgment, from which only individual faith will deliver individuals. The world chooses to ignore both the warnings of judgment and God's gracious provision for escape; but faith is that principle which, believing God, recognizes that God does as He says, and will tolerate no rebellion. If God says He will judge the world, He will do so. If He provides a way of escape for whosoever will receive it, then it is a perfect provision, and absolutely secures the soul from judgment. Thus Noah became "heir of the righteousness which is by faith." His works did not provide him with this righteousness, but his works were the result of faith in the living God, a faith which was counted to him as righteousness. But it is well that we notice in the first seven verses of our chapter that faith connects itself with four basic and mighty works of God, as God has revealed them. First, in verse 3, Creation; secondly, in verse 4, Redemption; thirdly, in verse 5, Translation, or new creation; and fourthly, in verse 7, Judgment, God's "strange work." Thus faith exalts the works of God, and has no confidence in what is merely man's work.

Verse 8 begins now a second section, in which Abraham and his family are the examples of faith. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out. not knowing whither he went." We shall see faith here, not only as related to the basic works of God, but to the personal experiences of life. God called Abraham out from a land of idol worshippers, from his own near relatives. It was no light step to take. He was a man of means, and no doubt of prominence; but when God called, it was a voice that could not be ignored: he obeyed. We are not told here with what hesitation he at first acted, for he went only as far as Haran, his father accompanying him, and did not go on until his father died. Such

weaknesses of the flesh are necessarily passed over in a chapter that deals with faith. But faith did lead Abraham on, and though not knowing where God was leading him, he went. This is faith in personal life. Can God be fully trusted, or not? Is this not a simple matter for faith to decide? If so, let faith act. If the Word of God tells me the path to take, then let me take it without question. Whatever the difficulties of it. God is more than sufficient for these. If only mere religious feeling prompts me, this is a useless substitute for the clearly declared Word of God. All personal preferences and feelings must utterly give way before this tribunal of absolute truth and authority. Faith therefore in this case connects with obedience. If I have no honest spirit of obedience to the Word of God, then it is mere hypocrisy to boast of having faith in God. When God speaks, faith obeys. For faith is that which trusts God absolutely in preference to every other confidence, and it trusts His Word as showing the only true and safe course for the believer. We shall obey in proportion, as we actually trust the Word of God. Faith does not fearfully inquire first as to what may result from taking a step of obedience: the results may be safely left with God. Abraham did not investigate first to find out all about the land God was sending him to: he obeyed!

"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." If faith first obeys, faith also continues. Here is the steadfast, plodding life of faith, not a settling down amid earthly comforts, but a pilgrim path, as Abraham's tent bore witness. Mere material, present advantage, is no object whatever for faith. God's promise of better things had laid hold of Abraham's soul, and Isaac and Jacob after him took the same pilgrim character (though indeed Jacob in particular was painfully inconsistent in it until his later years). Though Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, yet the promise of the land was to his earthly seed, and he knew that personally he would not take possession of it (Compare Gen. 15:13-15).

"For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." This goes beyond any Old Testament record of Abraham's expectations, and shows that faith looked further than the limits of what God had publicly revealed at the time. The heavenly city had never been mentioned then, but faith could easily recognize that the incorruptible God would provide that which was incorruptible, above all that man observes by his senses, subject as this is to the early corruption and dissolution. Faith then desires nothing less than what is entirely the workmanship of God. It will not be disappointed.

"Through faith Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful Who had promised." Faith here connects with the receiving of strength. For

while a step of obedience to God is admirable, and a life of stedfast continuance more admirable still, yet without the supply of God's power, these are impossible. Faith finds this too; and this completes a series of seven beautiful products of faith, basic in all godly character: 1. Wisdom (vs. 3); 2. Worship (vs. 4); 3. Walk (vs. 5); 4. Work (vs. 7); 5. Obedience (vs. 8); 6. Continuance (vs. 9); 7. Strength (vs. 11).

No comment is here made on the fact of Sara's weakness of faith when first God made the announcement that she should have a son (Gen. 18:9-15). But God had the last word, and Sara then believed it. And this simple trust in the truth of God's word produced the strength that was normally impossible. At ninety years of age she gave birth to Isaac. When God has spoken, do we not judge Him faithful, and expect Him to fully carry out what He has promised? Will He not also give the necessary strength for whatever purpose He may see fit to use us? Consider the results of Sara's eventual quiet submission of faith: "Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable." Here is fruit beyond calculation, and certainly beyond the limits of Sara's own hopes. Mere natural hope was dead, so that long before this she had given up any such expectation. Thus God teaches that He alone is the true Resource of His saints; and the fruit of faith's submission is greater far than appears at the time, or possibly for years after. Only eternity will actually reveal it. Faith does not ask to see results, nor depend upon results, but it will eventually produce them, however long the time may seem. It is the principle of life out of death-resurrection.

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Faith sees death to be but a necessary step toward the fulfilment of the promise, hence the quiet calmness of the patriarchs in the face of death. First in our verse we see faith's long sight; secondly, its firm, unshaken persuasion, thirdly, its embracing with the entire soul the preciousness of the truth of God; and fourthly, its unhesitating confession before the world that earth is but a foreign land of pilgrimage. How full, and real, and precious such character! Who would exchange it for all the wealth, pleasure, power and popularity the world may offer for a brief span of years? For the latter is but a bubble of air, bursting and gone, in comparison to eternal, solid substantial reality.

"For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better

country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city" The very actions of such examples of faith are a plain declaration that they seek something beyond and unseen, that is substantial and permanent. If Abraham had decided after coming to Canaan, that his previous home in Mesopotamia (where he had served idols) was preferable to a path of faith in the living God, then the way was open for him to return; but he had no such inclination. Just so, one who professes faith in Christ, if he prefers his former sins to a path of faith and the truth of God's Word, may return to his folly again; but this would only prove that he had never in actual faith embraced the promises of God. Abraham desired a better country, which could only be heavenly. however meagre was the knowledge of Abraham as to its character. He could trust Cod without being told everything. Much more has been revealed to us: how much more responsible this therefore renders us! And where this lowly, self-denying pilgrim character is in evidence. God is not ashamed to link His Name with it. Blessed if it can be said of ourselves that He is not ashamed to be called our God! He has prepared for us a city. Loneliness and deprivation now will give place to fullest fellowship and fullest provision there. For this, faith waits with patience.

From **verse 17 to 22** there are now four grand examples of faith's triumph in the very face of death, and this concludes the record from the book of Genesis. Observe in this that the greater part of this chapter of the examples of faith is taken from a history previous to the existence of Israel as a nation.

"By faith Abraham when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed he called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." This history found in Genesis 22 is sublimely beautiful, both in the deliberate, unhesitating obedience of Abraham, and in the calm submission of Isaac. Abraham's love for his son was unquestioned, yet at the Word of God he was willing to sacrifice him. It was a striking trial of his faith, for God had before told him, "In Isaac shall they seed be called," and as yet Isaac was a lad. When God had so spoken, Abraham reasoned that if Isaac should die, God would raise him up again, in order to fulfil His promise that Abraham would have descendants through Isaac. Faith thus reckons God's word as paramount and unbreakable, and can willingly give up the most cherished possession on earth for the sake of obedience to that Word. Blessed privilege indeed! Nothing was lost by such faith. Isaac was received back again as though from the dead, - that is in figure, for of course God would not actually suffer the father's hand to kill the child. And this too becomes a most precious type of the great sacrifice of our God and Father in giving His Son to redeem guilty sinners, by the death of the cross.

"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come." The history here is really no credit to the strength of Isaac's faith, for he intended to favor Esau rather than Jacob, no doubt because Esau was the elder; but God had said. "The elder shall serve the younger." However, the fact of Isaac so blessing his sons, as he himself was approaching death, is a simple witness to his faith in the living God, faith that death was no deterrent to the fulfilment of God's promise.

"By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff." In this case the same faith is evident, but more intelligent than in Isaac's case, for his right hand he placed on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, for he discerned the mind of God. And on the very verge of death the heart of the aged patriarch expands in unfeigned worship of God. Blessed confidence in the unfailing promise of God!

"By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." Genesis 50:24, 25 gives us this simple history. Joseph believed the promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Perhaps too he was acquainted with the word of God to Abraham that his seed would be a stranger in a strange land, afflicted for four hundred years before they would be brought back to the land of Canaan (Gen. 15:13, 14). But whatever the time, his bones were to be buried in Canaan, as indeed was the case. Even death, and long intervening years, was no barrier whatever, so far as faith was concerned, for it waits simply upon God.

Verse 23 now introduces 7 further distinct accomplishments of faith in connection with Israel's history from Egypt to Canaan, and this is followed by a more general list that covers the entire Old Testament. But it will have been noted in the first part of the chapter that Abraham is outstanding as an example of faith; in the latter part that Moses is outstanding. The former, being called to a path of godly separation, shows us the calm, steady endurance of faith. The latter, called to a rigorous service for God, illustrates the energy of faith.

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment" (Numerical Bible). The faith here was that of Moses' parents, - his mother in this case evidently taking the lead, according to the history. The beauty of the child was doubtless used to impress on them the glory of the Creator, who could be depended upon to honor their simple act of faith in Him. Their hiding the child no doubt endangered their own lives, but God's honor was more important than the king's commandment. Doubtless too the mother's afterward placing the child in the ark at the river's brink, was an act of faith which was used of God in a virtually miraculous way. Did she not actually give

him up into the hand of God, and in an unexpected way receive him back again? Thus faith never loses by its relinquishing anything into God's hand. May we learn such lessons well, in regard to our children, or any other possession with which we may be entrusted.

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." Forty years elapsed in Moses' life before this definite act of faith. Doubtless his soul was deeply torn and tested as he viewed the affliction of his own people at the hand of the very nation in which he himself was exalted. He had become great, but the people of God were, suffering. Could he then take pleasure in being heir to the throne of Egypt? Eventually he was compelled to face the issue. Faith could not countenance the cruel assault of an Egyptian against an Israelite, and Moses killed the former. It does not follow that Moses acted in faith in the killing and hiding of the body in the sand. Faith might have found more honourable and wise methods of dealing; so that while his actions were prompted by faith in God, yet they also give evidence of the weakness of his faith. It was certainly not as bold as on a later occasion. Nevertheless there was decision here, a real relinquishing of his regal honours, refusing the glories the world had given him.

But lest any should suggest that he ought to have remained in office in Egypt and use his influence in governmentally patronizing and improving the conditions of Israel, we answer that this would not be faith at all, but mere human sagacity. Verse 25 is the ringing answer to all this. Faith must identify itself with God's people, and suffer with them. A man may be a public champion, with motives of utter selfishness: if he really has a heart for the suffering saints of God, he will take his place with them in suffering. Wonderful choice indeed on the part of Moses, and put in contrast to "enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season." Whatever pleasure is found in sin, it is only momentary, and leaves a bitter emptiness in the end. A word in each of the three verses here has much to tell us as regards the decision of faith, -vs. 24, "refused"; vs. 25, "choosing"; vs. 26, "esteeming." This last is a sober, judicious estimate of things. How much better the reproach of Christ than all of Egypt's treasures! For though Christ had not yet been manifested, this faith was the anticipation of Himself as the suffering One on earth. Whether pleasure or treasure, things counted so high in the world's esteem, they were nothing compared to the joy of a path of suffering for Christ's sake. Moreover, faith has long vision. "The recompense of the reward" was a real consideration to Moses. How trivial the few fleeting years of this life in comparison to eternity! But let

us pay closest attention to this first act of faith: "he refused." It takes resolute decision to say "No" to the world's offers of finest advantage and distinction, but this is faith's blessed privilege.

Another forty years intervenes between verses 26 and 27, during which Moses had learned in solitary experience, in "the backside of the desert," that all the wisdom of Egypt was nothing to God. Then God called him to return to Egypt and lead the children of Israel out of it.

"By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." After repeated interviews with Pharaoh, and manifestations of God's heavy hand in plagues upon the nation, Moses is persuaded that Pharaoh has exceeded in defying the patience of God; and when Pharaoh angrily threatens Moses with death, the man of God boldly, solemnly tells the monarch, "Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more" (Ex. 10:28, 29). Here is his deliberate forsaking of Egypt: no longer will he labor with it in patience: he gives it up to the judgment of God. Pharaoh and his hosts were shortly drowned in the Red Sea. If in verses 24 to 26 we see decision, in verse 27 it is separation. And today the world is no longer under probation, as though God were labouring with it to change its attitude: it is rather under definite sentence of judgment which nothing can avert. Therefore faith forsakes the world, -gives it up to the judgment merited by its rebellion against God. Neither is there suggestion of fear or of cringing on the part of Moses: the king's power is far overshadowed for him by the presence of God, as plainly as though he could see his invisible Creator at his side. Blessed reality of faith! A path of faith is that of deliberate, real separation from the world.

"Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest He that destroyed the firstborn should touch them." Separation from the world must be attended by devotion to God. For if the world is under judgment because of sin, God must also judge sin in His own people. How can this be done without the judgment falling on their own heads? The Passover gives the answer. The blood of sacrifice must shelter the soul. Indeed, the blood on the doorposts and lintel was the sign that judgment had already fallen, though upon an innocent victim, - the lamb, - the punishment therefore borne by another. Blessed type of the great sacrifice of Christ, who has fully borne the judgment of every soul who in faith receives Him as Saviour. Judgment is past, and safety is assured. God had made the provision, and Moses by faith accepted it: the lamb was killed, and its blood sprinkled in simple obedience of faith. Thus Moses, by this act of unquestioning faith, would by means of the shedding of blood devote the children of Israel to God, as His own possession.

"By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned." No longer do we see only the personal faith of Moses here: all Israel is linked with him. The Passover has been the basis of this link just as the cross of Christ is the basis of the unity of the church of God, the one body (Eph. 2:16). Now Moses' faith is seen bearing its fruit in Israel. But here faith hears the humiliation of going down to the bottom of the Red Sea, type of death itself, yet being protected from death's overwhelming power. Confidence in God can afford to take the lowliest place, for exaltation follows: they pass through. The Egyptians seek to imitate this, but without faith, without the least humiliation of heart, and they find that unbelief is swallowed up where faith can safely pass.

After verse 29 the third 40 years of Moses' life intervenes; and it is both significant and humbling that all the 10 years' history of the wilderness is left silent in this record of faith in Hebrews 11. It was too largely a history of lack of faith as regards the nation itself, though individuals no doubt shine out on certain occasions (as Joshua and Caleb.) Moses dies before the event now recorded in verse 30: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.' How strange to the inhabitants of Jericho it must have appeared, to see Israel march in calm, orderly procession around the city once each day for six days,-then seven times on the seventh day. Can we doubt that in the city there was anxious apprehension as to the significance of all this? Some may have scoffed, but not without at least vague tremors of fear. Thus to the world today the Gospel of God is sounded in patient continuance, and it is itself a warning of judgment to come. The world entrenches itself against it, hoping it is secure; but it takes only the intervention of God to suddenly crumple all their defences: the walls fall down flat, and Israel is victorious. When God gave the order to Joshua, faith simply obeyed. Here is subjugation of enemies; and the believer who has learned the previous lessons, - seclusion, decision, separation, devotion, will also learn the triumphant language of 1 Corinthians 15:57: "Thanks he to God Who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ", a victory not over mere natural enemies, but over "spiritual hosts of wickedness" who threaten damage to all spiritual prosperity.

But there is a lovely conclusion to this sevenfold history of faith: "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace." Thus victory has not issued merely in destruction, but in this case, salvation. If there is victory in judging evil, how much more precious the victory in the deliverance of a soul from evil! How many were with her in the house we are not told, but all were preserved. The Spirit of God had wrought true conviction in her heart, which judged both the wretchedness of her own previous life and the stubborn rebellion of the city in which she dwelt. There can

be no doubt that faith produced a mighty change in this poor, sinful woman. The messengers of God she received with peace, and confessed the true condition of Jericho. Wonderful the grace of God which "brings salvation," and teaches us "that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:11, 12). Wonderful too that these seven steps in the history of Moses and of Israel end in salvation for others outside Israel! Good for us to apply these things to our personal lives.

"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." This general list of names and of those unnamed, together with the long list of conflicts and conquests of faith, is not intended to awaken our admiration of the people involved, but of the God who sustained and enabled them. Indeed, if we read the history of the first four named, we cannot but be impressed with their weakness of faith in many respects, yet in certain definite cases, they did act for God, and faith was in evidence. In other cases they broke down, and did not act by faith at all. We know the same of David also, a man beloved of God, yet falling into grievous sin, for which later he was broken down in deepest contrition before God. Samuel no doubt evidenced a much more steady and godly balance throughout his long life; and we ought all to be encouraged to exercise real, honest faith in every step of our experience, rather than on special occasions merely. It is the one principle that pleases God, and begets true happiness in the soul.

"Subduing kingdoms" would have a parallel in the New Testament in "the casting down of imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). As to "wrought righteousness," here is "the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left" (2 Cor. 6:7), righteousness acted on firmly in the face of wrongdoing. "Obtained promises" is a positive result of pleasing God, God revealing Himself in grace to the soul: "He that willeth to do God's will shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God" (John 7:17). "Stopped the mouths of lions" is answered in 1 Peter 5:8: "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour." Sober vigilance and stedfast faith are the preservatives. As to "the violence of fire," consider James 3:5.6; "escaping the edge of the sword." Matthew 26:52; "out of weakness were made strong." 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10; "waxed valiant in fight." Acts 14:45, 46: "turned to flight the armies of the aliens," 1 John 5:4.

"Women received their dead raised to life again." 2 Corinthians 2:8-10 is a similar New Testament experience along this line.

"Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection." Blessed faith indeed, and seen beautifully in Paul himself, who said, "I endure all things for the elect's sake" (2 Tim. 2:10), and "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13).

"And others had trial of cruel mocking and scourging, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy). They wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." If the Old Testament does not give us the details of such history, at least in many of these cases, yet doubtless they were not few; and the annals of subsequent Church history record a multitude of cases of the godly suffering these very things, and tortures even more cruel, for Christ's sake. How pregnant and precious that word, "of whom the world was not worthy."

But the summing up here is of very real interest: "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect," Though the promise of God in Christ Jesus was not fulfilled to them before their death, however ardently they may have looked for the Messiah of Israel, yet faith was maintained unto death. God had longer vision, having included present day saints in His counsels of grace. Christ came at the precisely right time, and has fulfilled the promise of God, and we on earth today enjoy this, while waiting for the day when both we and they shall be perfected. They too will yet receive the full blessing of the promise, in a higher way than will the earthly nation Israel. The better thing God has provided for us is the present knowledge on earth of the Son of God having come to fulfil the promise of God. It is thorough, untarnished grace, which should bow our hearts with adoring thanksgiving. Why indeed should we be its subjects rather than they, - who had so suffered for their faith? At least all of this serves to humble our hearts in thankfulness to the all wise and gracious God of glory.

Chapter 12

12: 1-4: The race and goal of faith

Verse 1: The race of faith

Verses 2-4: The goal of faith

12: 5-11: Chastening as an incentive to faith

Verses 5-9: The disciple of faith

Verses 10-11: The results of disciplined faith

12:12-17. A warning from Esau

Verses 12-14: The exhortation

Verses 15-17: The warning

12: 18 – 24: The result of faith that has obtained the promise

Verses 18-21: It delivers from a law of terror

Verses 22-24: It brings the blessings and relationship of grace

12: 25-29: Warning against refusing to heed God's voice

Verses 25-27: The danger of sin

Verses 28-29: The preventive against the sin

How rightly now Chapter 12 admonishes the saints of God to act by faith; for where faith is in godly exercise, every honourable and true responsibility will be willingly assumed, with the confidence of Divine help to enable its faithful discharge. "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith; Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." This "great cloud of witnesses" are those of whom we have read in Ch. 11. Our advantage is how much greater than theirs; for they were not

provided with such a host of examples of faith as we are. But faith in Christ has put us on the racecourse, where endurance is so necessary an asset. Indeed, are the features of the race not seen beautifully in Ch. 11, a host pressing on toward brighter things than the entire world could offer? A racer must lay aside every weight, not because weights are contrary to the rules of the race, but because by these he will hinder his own progress. Hence weights are not sins, but the cares of this world, occupation with things merely material, which so engage the time that the exercise of faith is hindered. But if weights are assumed, sin will more easily beset us, for the energy of faith is not present to outdistance sin's temptations. Some Christians may be content to take a very slow pace Heavenward, weighted down by present desire for some earthly advantage or comfort; and like Peter "following afar off" find themselves suddenly caught in sin's cunning trap. F. W. Grant points out that if we thought of sin as a pack of wolves at our heels, we should certainly not choose to carry heavy weights with us.

Verse 2 speaks of Jesus as "the Leader and Completer of faith" as it may be translated. Such is the blessed Object or Goal of the saint, - "looking unto Jesus." Many others have been witnesses: He is the one Leader, the perfect exemplification of faith in all His path on earth; the Completer, He Who Himself will culminate every path of faith in blessed fulfilment of all the promises of God. In Him faith will have its complete answer and reward. Indeed, this wonderful conclusion of God's counsels in infinite blessing, with its future joy unspeakable, was a wonderful incentive to the Lord Jesus Himself, to endure the cross, the awful judgment of God for our sins; "despising the shame," that is, thinking lightly of the contempt and persecution of men, considering it nothing in comparison to the glory that would later be revealed. How blessed an Object for our own faith! And now He sits at God's right hand, His own sufferings over, but waiting yet the fulfilment of the fruits of His great work. Is it a great thing therefore for us to patiently endure? The end in view is no less certain for us, with its indescribable joy.

"For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." Here is the blessed antidote to all discouragement, simply the honest consideration of the Lord Jesus. The Master had been persecuted: what else could His disciples expect? Moreover, the Master had resisted unto death all the efforts of sinful men to influence Him to surrender to sin's mastery. The Hebrews had not yet been called to go this far: would they give up for the sake of clinging to a few moments of earthly comfort? "Striving against sin" here is not the personal struggle of Romans 7, the individual fighting to free himself from sinful thoughts and feelings. In this case he must learn not to fight.

but submit to the power and grace of the Lord Jesus, applying the cross of Christ to all that he is in the flesh. Nor is it here the conflict of Ephesians 6, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places. For that conflict is in reference to gaining and holding the truth of God in its purity and uncorruptness, against which Satan so cunningly fights. But here rather it is standing with firmness against men's persecuting efforts to entangle our souls in the same sin they prefer to serve. It is a battle, but faith is the principle that overcomes.

But another aspect of suffering is considered from verse 5 to verse 11: "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." If they suffered persecution from sinners, yet it was God who was allowing this means by which to train His own to conform to His own thoughts: this was "the chastening of the Lord." Blessed is that faith that looks far deeper than the surface of things, to see that every bit of trial and affliction, though it may be occasioned by the grossest wickedness of men, is under the perfect control of our God and Father, being the very thing our own souls need to form them in the pattern God has planned. A child may little understand the reasons for his father's dealings, but if the father has proven himself perfectly kind and trustworthy toward his child, then the child may have fullest confidence that those dealings are to be trusted.

Yet, let us note that this is to be with no spirit of mere lightness or unconcern: we are not to "despise the chastening of the Lord," because it is for a purpose. Nor are we, on the other hand, to "faint," that is, to become discouraged and give in to a spirit of complaint. It is God's love that is responsible for these afflictions, and every son He receives must have his share in this.

"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers. Then are ye bastards, and not sons." Enduring here is therefore neither despising nor rebelling, but taking it as from the hand of God. In this spirit alone can we enjoy the proper privileges of our relationship as sons of our God and Father, and reap the benefits of His dealings with us. It will be observed too in verse 11 that this "enduring" involves exercise of soul, in godly concern as to God's dealings. But if one were to find no testings of faith after professing to be a believer, it would indicate he was not a son of God at all.

"Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us as seemed good to

them (margin); but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness." God has Himself designed this human relationship as a type of that which is much higher, and spiritual. Correction of a child is absolutely essential for the good of the child, though this depends on the attitude of the father: whatever seems suitable to him will govern his training of the child. However, God's training is perfection itself: its object is the pure profit of the child, and no detail of it can be a mistake. Blessed indeed to be in such a hand! Only thus we learn to conform to God's own character of holiness, to honestly love what is good, and to hate evil.

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." The chastening, as we have seen, refers to those outward circumstances of sorrow, trial, persecution, every element that is allowed to give distress or pain to the soul. These will grieve the heart rather than cause joy, though faith is able to triumph even while the trial is present, when the eye is simply upon Christ. Indeed, in the face of persecution we are told to "rejoice and be exceeding glad" (Matt. 5:11, 12). At least, where godly exercise has wrought its work in recognizing the hand of God in these things, the blessed result will be "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." The storm will give place to the quiet calm of solid, true blessing. God's hand must be recognized in the trial, and the soul be drawn to seek His mind concerning it, or we can expect no blessing as a result of it: we should be guilty of resisting God's goodness in designing such things in view of our greatest blessing.

"Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed." In the knowledge of God there is no room for discouragement: hands are for active work: our knees should have strength to enable us to stand with firm decision: our feet are for walking, and should have "straight paths" in order that there be no mere aimless wandering, but definite purpose. Moreover, an uneven, tortuous path would itself discourage "that which was lame." We may be guilty of discouraging others by our failure to hold fast to the straight paths of the Word of God. Certainly the straight path itself is never responsible for discouragement: it would tend rather to heal; and our walking in such paths will tend to restore and heal those who falter.

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Peace and holiness are normal fruits of Christianity: if they are entirely absent, one has not known the Lord, nor will he stand in His presence. But let the believer follow these things in wholehearted devotion. Too often also souls may divorce these things, and insist on peace while ignoring holiness, or insist

on holiness while ignoring peace. The former involves a friendly tolerance of sin, the latter a contentious spirit of legality. Our preservation lies in godly concern to follow both peace and holiness.

"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; (for he found no place of repentance), though he sought it carefully with tears." Godly watchfulness is only becoming to the people of God, for the enemy is ever active in seeking to tear down from inside. One may "fail of the grace of God," that is, though he has known that grace in theory, yet his heart has not embraced it: he is outwardly a disciple, but not so in heart. In such soil, "a root of bitterness" may easily spring up, a revulsion against the pure, precious Word of God and against the holy Person of the Lord Jesus. If such should occur among Christians, how easily others may be defiled, - not perhaps going to the same lengths as the bitter offender, yet badly affected by his unholy ways. The person spoken of as "a fornicator or profane person, as Esau" is of course not a believer at all, though he may have passed as one, and for this reason can be dangerous.

The test manifested Esau as an unbeliever: he sold his birthright to fill his stomach. That which God had given him he regarded with indifference, if not contempt: he despised the grace of God. Yet he afterward desired to inherit the blessing, and evidently expected to do so in spite of his having willingly forfeited it. Such is the perversity of the flesh. He shed tears of anguish in desire for the blessing, but he found no place of repentance. Not that he sought repentance: it was the blessing he sought, but did not care to repent of his proud contempt of the grace of God, which indeed is the only ground upon which God will allow the blessing.

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure that which was commanded. And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart; and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.") Esau sought the blessing on the ground of mere human rights, with no repentance: this would be in principle coming to Mount Sinai, where one must expect to meet with the most forbidding, repelling anger of God. Merely touching the mount meant death. Fire signified the burning holiness of God in judgment. Blackness and darkness denotes the utter

absence of light in any mere legal position as before God: while the tempest indicates a state of troubled unrest. The sound of the trumpet and the voice of words is the ringing declaration of truth without mercy, which implanted awful fear in the hearts of the hearers. They could not endure what was commanded. Note too that even a beast, which is not a morally evil creature, could not approach the mount: indeed no creature, even unfallen (as the angels of God) can approach the holy presence of God on the basis of creature merit: how much less man, who is sinful! Even Moses, the mediator, type of Christ, was filled with quaking fear. In all of this too it is most striking that no form is seen, and no face: God is hidden. This is the mount to which Israel came, where they received the law, under which they remained responsible until such time as God would in grace reveal Himself in the Person of His Son.

"But ye have come to Mount Sion; and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; and to myriads of angels, the universal gathering; and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enregistered in Heaven; and to God, Judge of all: and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus, Mediator of the new covenant; and to the blood of sprinkling, speaking better than Abel" (N. Trans.). The eternal value and blessedness of these eight subjects is in wonderful contrast to what goes before, in which no ray of actual, true blessing to mankind could penetrate the gloom: indeed nothing but the curse could actually accompany pure law. But pure Divine grace manifests both the marvelous counsels of God, the great blessings of God, and the glory of His Person. And to this believers have come. First, Mount Sion (meaning 'sunny' rather than dark) is the earthly center of blessing in Jerusalem promised of God for the coming day of Israel's glory, a state of settled blessing for the nation. Faith even now, believing in the unshakeable character of the counsels of God, rests in anticipation of this. Not that our place will be in the earthly city, but both Jewish and Gentile believers today have title to rejoice in the certainty of God's counsels of grace concerning the eventual blessing of earth. Secondly however, "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," gives us the certainty of future heavenly blessing for all those for whom God has prepared that city. For though no doubt it is the Bridal city, named for the Bride, the church, yet it includes all saints of past ages, and martyrs also of the tribulation period. Thirdly, "myriads of angels, the universal gathering," would widen our vision further, to see greater multitudes still rejoicing in unity of worship and adoration, the fruit of God's counsels of grace. Let us notice again, all of this involves the precious anticipation of faith.

Fourthly, "the church of the firstborn, unregistered in Heaven," involves the actual blessing enjoyed now by grace, by the church, whose blessings are on a heavenly level. Fifthly, "to God the Judge of all." Not only are we blessed in being linked with the marvellous administration of God's counsels of grace, but

we are brought without fear to the Great Judge, the Administrator Himself. The thick darkness no longer hides Him: He is "in the light." Sixthly, "to the spirits of just men made perfect." This expression can refer only to Old Testament saints, as a class, who have waited in disembodied form all through the dispensation of grace, for the future day of resurrection, when they will be made perfect. Without them God's counsels of grace would be incomplete, and we rejoice in prospect of their blessing too.

Seventhly, "to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant" This precious Name of moral grace and beauty emphasizes the reality of His Manhood, as the one Mediator between God and men. For if we see revealed in His Person, on the one hand, the perfect light of the knowledge of the glory of God - that is, eternal Deity, - yet on the other hand is the wonder of His human perfection as the only possible Mediator acceptable with God. To Him we are brought in righteousness and peace, with no cloud to intervene. In the eighth place (number of new creation) is "the blood of sprinkling, speaking better than Abel." Here is the precious witness of an accomplished work, the necessary basis upon which every blessing in grace becomes effective, - blood that maintains an eternal value, and for which our hearts shall be filled with unceasing thanksgiving to God for eternity! Marvellous, infinite completeness of blessing!

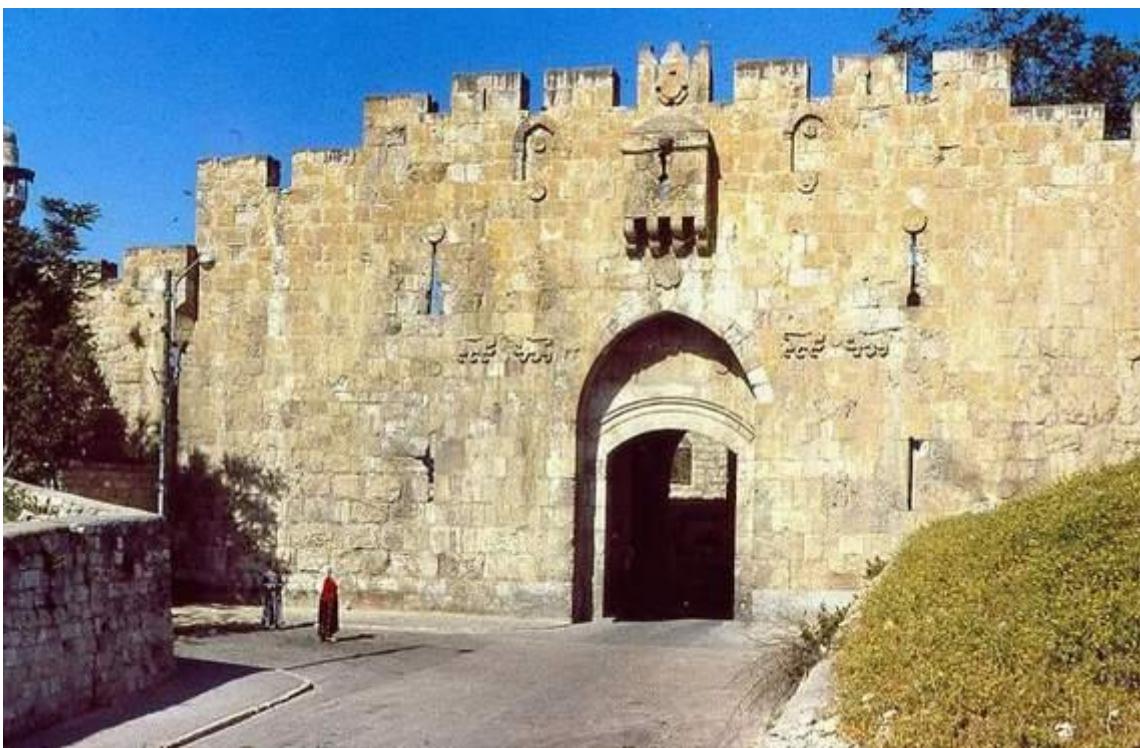
"See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven. Whose voice then shook the earth: but now He hath promised saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also Heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things that cannot be shaken may remain." The exhortation here is most solemn. When God had spoken on earth, that is, in the giving of the law, with all the awesome accompaniments that inspired terror in the children of Israel, and in such a manifestation of His power and holiness, refusal meant stern judgment; then how much more so now that God has spoken from Heaven, His own great glory revealed in the Person of His Son. His nature of infinite love displayed in the blessed sacrifice of that Son. Blessed, Heavenly revelation! How dreadfully culpable then the guilt of turning away from such matchless, infinite grace.

For grace is no indulgent toleration of rebellion. God will maintain His rights as Sovereign Judge and Creator. If His voice shook the earth at Sinai, it will yet shake more than the earth. "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Pet. 2:10). Reaching for the moon or the planets

will be no escape from this dire judgment: man's only hope is in Him who is "made higher than the heavens," the Lord Jesus Christ.

The quotation from Haggai 2:6, "Yet once more" is shown to indicate that this will mean the removal of all that is temporary, that only what is eternal may remain. For it is only "once" then the results can be nothing but eternal. We have seen the word used before in Hebrews in the same final, absolute way.

"Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom that cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire" Blessed such a kingdom of eternal character, but received now by faith. "My kingdom is not of this world," the King Himself has declared (John 18:36), for "the world passeth away, and the lust thereof" (1 John 2:17). Since this kingdom cannot be moved, let us not be moved either, but draw from God the grace to serve Him acceptably, that is, in a manner acceptable to Him, consistent with His eternal nature and counsels. And a becoming reverence is to be accompanied by godly fear, a wholesome, serious regard for the awful majesty of God. For He is a consuming fire, fearful in holiness, consuming all that will not stand the test of eternity. The display of His grace by no means involves the slightest giving up of His holiness.



Tradition holds that Stephen was martyred outside this gate in Jerusalem

Chapter 13

13:1-6: The expression of faith in daily living

Verses 1-4: In social relationships

Verses 5-6: In financial matters

13:7-9: Faith's expression in a stable testimony

Verses 7-8: The example

Verse 9: The exhortation

13: 10-14: Faith expressed in separation from Judaism

Verses 10-12: The basis of separation

Verses 13-14 The exhortation to separation

13: 15-17: Faith expressed in spiritual worship and obedience

Verses 15-16: Sacrificial worship

Verse 17: Humble obedience

13: 18-25: Concluding benediction

Verses 19-19: Personal request

Verses 20-21: Benediction

Verses 22-25: Concluding salutation

The first six verses of this chapter have a striking moral relationship to what has gone before. We have seen that though God's dispensational ways have undergone a mighty change in the advent of His beloved Son, yet His nature and character remain unchangeable. Now these verses show that moral responsibilities are not abolished either. "Let brotherly love continue." Dispensational change was not to change this at all: It is a character applicable to all ages. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Abraham's hospitality (Gen. 18) is a lovely

example, not only for his earthly seed, Israel, but for ourselves. This is a general rule, though 2 John 8-11 is an important exception: one who comes propagating a doctrine that dishonours the Person of Christ, must be refused all hospitality, and not even accorded the courtesy of a common greeting.

"Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body." Thus, our present dispensation, though Heavenly and spiritual, does not relieve us from having to face the groans of creation: just as godly Israelites suffered for their faith in the Old Testament, so Christians also endured persecution and imprisonment for Christ's sake; and compassionate sympathy for such is but normal and proper Christianity.

"Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." Here again Christianity in no wise annuls the sanctity of relationships established in creation. Some have dared to teach this; but this involves the wicked denial of moral principles that remain unchanged through all dispensations. Indeed, even the law allowed inconsistencies because of the hardness of men's hearts-not because God approved, - but Christianity reaffirms God's creatorial rights in this regard (Matt. 19:39). But the law demanded death for an adulterer. Such evil is no less serious today than then, but judgment for it is in God's hands, not in ours. Of course, in the assembly of God, such abuse would require the firm discipline of the assembly as such, and putting away from fellowship, (1 Cor. 5) but the actual judgment for such guilt God reserves for Himself, rather than now appointing His people to execute capital punishment.

"Let your conversation be without covetousness: and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." Personal godly conduct and character was not to be changed because of a changed dispensation, though "Thou shalt not covet" is replaced by the more gentle, persuasive language of grace. Two quotations are found in these verses from the Old Testament, first the blessed promise of God to Joshua, a man of faith, and seen here to be applicable to every child of faith, in every age. Secondly, there is the bold response of faith to such language of the Psalmist (Psa. 118:6), which every believer may adopt at all times, regardless of dispensation; and certainly ourselves, whose lot is fallen in a dispensation which is pre-eminently addressed to faith.

But if the first six verses have dealt with that which continues in spite of dispensational change, what follows now is characteristic of the new

dispensation, to which no addition can be allowed, nor is advance possible. Let us consider this most thoroughly and digest well its implications.

"Remember your leaders who have spoken to you the Word of God; and considering the issue of their conversation, imitate their faith: Jesus Christ is the Same yesterday, and today, and to the ages (to come)" (N. Trans.). In verse 17 we shall find that leaders are to be obeyed, but in verse 7 it is evident that deceased leaders are referred to, and to be remembered. Some had doubtless suffered martyrdom for Christ: their faith had stood fast even unto death. Blessed example! Their faith was worth following. This is no mere imitation of their methods, but acting upon the vital principle of faith, as they did. Let us remember today not to dismiss from our minds the godly example and faith of men of God who are now with the Lord. Leaders of this kind are those who have sought no following for themselves, but have directed souls to the Lord,-guided them in the paths of the pure Word of God. Their conversation, that is, their entire manner of life and conduct, had a definite end in view: it was no mere haphazard conglomeration of motives that moved them: there was a vital issue above all else that influenced their actions. This we are bidden to consider. What was the secret of their stability? Their faith was in "Jesus Christ, the Same yesterday, and today, and forever." Why ought a believer to change when he has a Master who does not? "Yesterday" would refer to the blessed manifestation in flesh of the Son of God, His entire earthly path of infinite grace and truth. "Today" at the right hand of God He is the Same. Of course, having died and risen again, He is changed in bodily condition, but in Person, in nature, in moral character, He remains unchangeable. Blessed, faithful Lord. "And forever!" No possible circumstance can ever alter this holy, gracious lord of glory. What an Object for faith! What a consideration for our souls! How comforting, refreshing, encouraging, strengthening, stabilizing! May we unceasingly adore His precious Name.

"Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart he established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein" The revelation of God in Christ is certainly infinitely better than the forms and laws of Judaism; but after such revelation, advance or improvement is impossible. Men may introduce new and diverse doctrines, but they are an insult to the blessed Person of Christ, and strange in the sense of being foreign to God's revelation. Unstable souls may be beguiled by them, but as we have seen, stability is found in the Person of Christ. The heart must he established with grace. May we know more fully and purely the sweet significance of that grace which has met the claims of a broken law, delivered us from bondage, and provided a liberty wherewith to serve God with wholehearted, voluntary devotion. How much more than conscientiousness is

this! Not indeed that conscience is ignored, but rather that, being exercised by the Word of God, the soul gladly acquiesces in that which conscience approves. Thankful affection for the Lord thus becomes the motive, not a mere sense of duty. The legal principle is banished, as are its forms and ceremonies. "Not with meats" is a word added here to insist that mere temporal instances of self-denial must be no object in a believer's life. They are good indeed if practiced honestly for the Lord's sake, with no thought of spiritual merit in them; but refraining from certain meats will make a soul no better or no worse. "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats, but the Lord shall destroy both it and them" (1 Cor. 6:13). A believer ought to be able to give up his rights easily, whether eating of meat or anything else, without attaching any sanctimonious virtue to it, or considering it a legal imposition. Let grace reign in it, and it is very simple and honourable, as well as profitable. But those who occupy themselves with those things rather than with the grace of God, do not find profit for their own souls.

"We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle." The Person of the Lord Jesus is the altar that sanctifies the gift, that is, which gives value to His work of sacrifice. The believer partakes of this altar, as the offerer was privileged in Israel to eat of the peace offerings. But one who serves the tabernacle, that is, clings to Judaism (which was but a temporary order of things), by that very fact ignores the glory of the Person of Christ and the efficacy of His sacrifice.

What right then could he possibly have in the fellowship of Christianity? There was the clearest line of demarcation between the two.

"For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." Here another comparison with Judaism serves to strongly illustrate the great contrast between this and Christianity. On the great day of atonement, once each year, the high priest must take the blood of the sin offering into the holy place, sprinkling it before and on the mercy-seat (Lev. 16:11-19). But the body of the sin-offering, whether bull or goat, was to be taken outside the camp and burned (Lev. 16:27). None of this was to be eaten at all, but outside the camp all was to ascend in smoke, as it were, to God.

How strikingly beautiful is such a type as this. The blessed Lord of Glory, in order to fulfil the type perfectly, was rejected by His own earthly people, led outside the city of Jerusalem, and crucified. That which was solidly established

as God's testimony on earth, having received the oracles of God, having the promise of the Great King, for Whom they professed to look with fervent anticipation, has yet been guilty of completely refusing this holy, gracious Messiah, who came with every possible proof of His glory, in fulfilment of the Scriptures they revered. Totally rejected by Israel, He "suffered without the gate."

Is this not a clearest indication of the fact that both the world in general, and mere formal religion in particular, will allow no place for the blessed Son of God?

But in so suffering outside the gate, He sanctifies the people with His own blood. Indeed, His blood speaks inside the holiest of all, in such manner as to eternally satisfy and glorify God, and this is sanctification to God. Yet sanctification to God must also involve sanctification from the world,-a setting apart in a very real and holy manner. He Himself was forced apart from all that was considered dignified and honourable on earth, and His people must expect to share with Him the same rejection, if they would follow Him. Yet such a path will be actually sweet to the soul, in just such proportion as we appreciate and enter into the sorrows of our Lord as the One "despised and rejected of men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." May we deeply meditate upon Him and upon the holy reality of His sufferings, both from man's hand of hatred and contempt, and from God's hand of perfect justice on account of our sins. How truly this will temper the trials of our own path, and give us actual joy in "bearing all things."

What then does it require but simple, decided energy of faith to heed the exhortation, "Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach"? For a Jew to leave the camp of Judaism was no light matter: he could expect the same reproach that Israel meted out to his Master. But it is well to insist that our going forth is to be "unto Him." There is no real comfort, no shelter, no strength at all for a path of reproach such as this, unless these are found in the very real presence of the Lord. His blessed Person is the only sufficiency for this, and thank God a perfect sufficiency. Do we love Him? Do we trust Him? Then let us gladly bear His reproach. If it pains us, let us rather think of His greater pain. If it incurs men's contempt or mockery, let us think of His patiently bearing that which was far worse.

The camp of Judaism was what had been previously established by God, but had degenerated into a mere formal religion, leaving no room for the gracious authority of the Lord Jesus. How similar to Exodus 33, where, on account of the sin of the golden calf, Moses pitched the tabernacle afar off from the camp, and

everyone who sought the Lord went out to Moses. It was a case clearly demonstrated, of the Lord's authority being refused: then the believer must go to where the Lord's authority actually is.

The same principle must apply at all times. If, for instance, Christian testimony should degenerate to such a state as to be comparable to formal Judaism, where religious ritual is observed, but the Name and authority of the Lord Jesus ignored, then it has become the mere "camp," degraded to an earthly basis, marked by worldly principles. The believer is called to go forth unto Him, from all such hollow profession. He may be reproached for it, he may be made to feel the loneliness of such a path, but if it is truly "unto Him," the recompense is infinitely sweet. His own presence will more than compensate for every present loss.

For, after all, our time on earth is exceedingly brief at the most: "here we have no continuing city," no place of settled fellowship, for all here is both greatly impaired, and rapidly passing away. "But we seek one to come." What a prospect of unspeakable joy!-a fellowship of perfect purity and blessedness, where the Person and authority of the Lord Jesus is the very basis of its holy unity and sweetness for eternity. In view of so marvellous an end, how small indeed in comparison is whatever reproach and suffering we may bear in the present time, for Christ's sake. We shall welcome this in just such measure as our minds are set on things above.

"By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His Name. But to do good and communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." A proper stand for the truth of the Word of God will not tend to make us critical or bitter toward others, nor haughty and self-satisfied, but to rather fill our hearts with the lowly spirit of praise to God continually. This is said also to be a sacrifice, for is it not the willing giving up of confidence in the flesh, the refusal of personal honour in order that true honour and glory be given to the eternal God? If such praise and thanksgiving is our delight "continually," there will of course be no place whatever for complaint or cold criticism. But another sacrifice is closely linked with this, that is the active energy of goodness toward others, the willing sharing of our earthly goods with those who are in need. Blessed to have the assurance in this that "God is well pleased." Is it not the most blessed occupation on earth to please Him?

This will of course also be conducive to orderly conduct. "Obey your leaders, and be submissive; for they watch for your souls as those that shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not groaning, for this would be unprofitable

for you." These of course are living leaders, in contrast to verse 7; but the verse supposes a normal Christian character of godly concern for souls. If leaders depart from the faith, they must not be followed, but if seeking to walk with God and to watch for souls, it is a serious responsibility to obey them. A truly worshipping heart will find no difficulty in honest submission in matters of order and government. For let us remember that leaders must give account to the God whom they are responsible to serve. It would seem that this refers, not to the future judgment seat of Christ, but to a present accounting before God of the state and welfare of the assembly,-which may be with "anguish of heart," in which exercise before God the apostle wrote to Corinth, (2 Cor. 2:4); or with profound joy, as in the case of the Thessalonians: "For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before God" (1 Thess. 3:9). But though a leader may have to give account with groaning, let us mark that this is not said to be unprofitable for the leader, but "for you." It is the in subject heart that suffers loss, while godly leaders may be deeply pained for the sake of that precious soul, and pour out their hearts in humiliation and prayer before God. Indeed, this very exercise will prove spiritually profitable for the leader, but the disobedient child of God will lose.

"Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner." The lowliness of the apostle is a lovely example for us. He solicits the prayers of which he feels the need, but it is no request to be lightly made: the request ought to be backed up by an honest willingness to live rightly before God. To ask prayer while desiring a self-willed, self-pleasing course, is an effort to enlist God's help in wrongdoing. As to verse 19, it does not appear that he means release from prison, for it seems he was not in prison at the time; but evidently he had a longing to return to Judea, and sought their prayers to this end. Compare vs. 23.

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ: to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." How full and appropriate this lovely closing prayer! For troubled Hebrews there was a God of peace, Who had laid the firm basis of peace in raising from among the dead Him whose heart was that of a faithful Shepherd, - great indeed also in the power of resurrection life. And this resurrection was consistent with the preciousness of His death: the value of the blood of the eternal covenant was such that resurrection was the righteous result. Again, let us mark, here is eternal virtue in contrast to all that was temporal in Judaism: the covenant is eternal because the value of the blood is eternal; and

the blessed Shepherd lives in the power of an endless life. Wonderful fulness, and perfection of blessing for His sheep! With such a provision, how can our hearts fail to respond with real desire to be made perfect or mature in every good work to do His will? Yet again, the working of this must be on the part of God. Our resources are all in Him, through Jesus Christ; and practical results in our lives must be the result of submission to the working of His hand. Then we shall seek no credit for ourselves, but heartily ascribe to Him "glory for ever and ever."

"And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words." It is a tender appeal to his own nation, or at least to those in the nation who professed Christianity. Certainly any reasonable and thoughtful mind cannot but be amazed at the few words with which so great and wonderful a subject is expounded. The inspiration of God is the only answer.

"Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty: with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you." The apostle counts upon their affection for Timothy, and thankfulness for his liberty. Is there not a designed analogy here? For the object of the entire epistle is surely to set at complete liberty from Judaism these Hebrew believers. And Timothy's name (means "honouring God") bears its bright witness to the fruits of true Christian liberty.

"Salute all your leaders, and all the saints. They from Italy salute you. Grace be with you all. Amen." For the third time in the chapter leaders are spoken of, and as worthy of respect. For though the epistle sets aside mere officialism and ritualism, yet it would carefully guard against any ignoring of proper godly authority in the hands of those whom God has given to care for the sheep. But all the saints are to be shown kindly respect. And the saints of Italy too witness their unity with the Hebrew saints. Blessed the workings of the matchless grace of God! May it be with us all.

Evaluation

The greatest single value of the book of Hebrews is its teaching on the present ministry and priesthood of Christ. There are many references in the New Testament to his ascension and his place at the right hand of the Father, but with the exception of Romans 8:34 none of these explains what he is now doing. Hebrews, by its interpretation of the Messianic reference in Psalm 110:4, "Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent: Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek," has given a whole new ground of assurance to the believer in Christ. As the Aaronic priesthood by its sacrifices and intercession ministered to the Old Testament believer who obeyed the law, so Christ, in a

fuller measure, though invisible, ministers now to those under grace. Those who witnessed the passing of the Jewish priesthood and felt that with it a divinely ordained system of salvation had vanished, must have been greatly reassured by the teaching that this man "forever hath his priesthood unchangeable" (Heb. 7:24).

Hebrews is an excellent specimen of teaching in the early church. Unlike many of Paul's epistles, it was not taken up with a variety of questions that had no particular relation to each other, nor was it an evangelistic sermon addressed to a promiscuous audience. It is an exposition of one theme, the new revelation of God, based on the passages in the Old Testament that contain the latent truth, and developed in orderly rhetorical fashion to a climax. Its use of quotations gives a good idea of the passages and the methods of interpretation that were used by the Christian teachers of the first century.

Doctrinally Hebrews accords with the Pauline epistles, although it is not patterned according to their phraseology. Its theme, like that of Romans and Galatians, is salvation by faith in the sacrifice of Christ. The illustration of Abraham's faith is given more space in Hebrews than any other instance, thus bringing it into line with Paul's use of it. In the few casual references to the earthly life of Christ there are some resemblances to Luke (2:3, Luke 1:2; 2:18, Luke 4:13; 5:7, Luke 22:44; 12:2, Luke 9:51; 12:24, Luke 22:20), although they are not close enough to prove anything with regard to authorship. Hebrews is a good witness to the growing independence of the Gentile church and to the enlargement of universal revelation that came through Christ.

In its Christology, Hebrews adds much to the doctrine of the atonement, which it places in a covenantal relationship. This book explains the meaning of the new covenant more fully than did Jeremiah, whom it quotes (Heb. 8:8-12; Jer. 31:31-34), or than did Jesus himself. Hebrews connects the incarnation with the atonement (Heb. 2:14-17).

In the study of the Old Testament Hebrews is an excellent guide to the meaning of typology and to an understanding of the lasting significance of the Levitical ritual. It does not purport to give a detailed exposition of all the features of the offerings and feasts, but its confirmation of their prophetic function in pointing forward to Christ is a valuable key for unlocking the treasures of the Old Testament. It is the best commentary available on these subjects.

The most familiar passage in Hebrews is, of course, the eleventh chapter; it sketches the progress of faith by the use of Old Testament illustrations. Romans, taking the text from Habakkuk, explains the meaning of just and

shows who is justified and how he is justified. Galatians shows what the life under grace really is, an exercise of spiritual liberty, and so expounds the idea of *live*. Hebrews demonstrates the meaning and progress of *faith*. By its warnings, by its exhortations, and by its gallery of examples it seeks to show what faith is, how it functions, and what results it achieves. These three books, Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, form a trilogy explaining the heart and essence of the Christian life of faith.

Questionnaire on Hebrews

1. For what primary purpose was the Epistle written?
2. How does the writer go about carrying out the primary purpose of the Epistle?
3. What points of internal evidence indicate that Paul is the writer of Hebrews (Compare Heb. 1:4-14 with Rom. 3:9-19, and Heb. 12:1 with I Cor. 9:24-27 and Gal. 5:7; and Heb. with Rom. and Gal.; and Phil. 1:1 and Heb. 13:23; and the closing 13:25 with the other Pauline Epistles) Compare I Cor. 3:1-3 with Heb. 5:12-15.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
4. Through whom, and how, did God speak unto “the fathers”,?
5. What is the meaning of the writers statement that God “hath at the end of these days — (ASV),these last days (KJV, NKJV, RSV, NIV) spoken unto us in his Son.” (Isa. 2:2-3; Micah 4:1-2; Joel 2:28-33; Acts 2:16-21)?
6. List four of the things that the writer gives to show that Christ is greater than the prophets and angels.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
7. What application did Paul make of Ps.2:7 as recorded in Acts 13:33-34?

8. What application does the writer make of Ps. 110:1'?
9. When will Ps. 110:1 be completely fulfilled (Acts 2:33-34, 3:21-22; 1 Cor. 15:24-26)?
10. The writer affirms that angels are “ministering spirits sent forth to do service for the sake of _____.”

CHAPTER TWO:

11. What does he say about the word, or message, that was spoken through angels, and what exhortation does he give?
 - 1.
 - 2.
12. How was the message of the apostles of Christ confirmed?
13. Some reason that Paul could not be the author of Hebrews on the basis of the reading
in verse three.. Discuss.

14. In verses six through eight of chapter two the writer is quoting from _____
15. What comment does the writer make after giving the quotations?
 - 1.
 - 2.
16. Give two of the reasons given in the latter part of chapter two as to why Jesus “partook of flesh and blood”.
 - 1.
 - 2.

CHAPTER THREE:

17. In chapter three the writer affirms that Christ is the _____ and of _____

_____ our confession.

18. Give two reasons why Christ has “been counted worthy of more glory than Moses.”

1.

2.

- B. What “house” did Christ build (Mt. 16:13-19; Acts 2:14, 37-41; 1 Tim 3:14-15)?

- C. The writer also affirms that we are “his house” if we _____

_____.

19. Give three statements made in chapter three which show that a child of God can fall from grace (3:6ff).

1.

2.

3.

CHAPTER FOUR:

20. In what way does the writer reason that the Hebrew Christians were like the Israelites?

- B. Why did the Israelites not profit by the “good tidings” preached to them?

21. What exhortation does the writer give about entering into God’s rest?

1.

2.

22. How is the power of the word of God described in Heb.4:12-13?

1.

2.

23. On what basis does the writer reason that we should “draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace”?

1.

2.

CHAPTER FIVE:

24. What people were to serve as priests under the law (Ex. 28:1-2; Lev. 8:1-9, 10:8-11;.Nu. 4:15-20)?
25. What happened when other men tried to make themselves priests (Nu. 16:1-3, 8-11, 28-35)?
26. What people are to serve as priests under the New Testament (I Pet. 2:5-9)?
27. In chapter five the writer affirms that Christ is a priest for _____ after the order of _____.
28. Why was it going to be hard for the writer to explain, or interpret to the Hebrew Christians how that Christ is a ‘high priest after the order of Melchizedek’?
29. Compare Heb. 5:12-14 with I Cor. 3:1-3.
30. The Hebrews should have been _____ when they still needed _____

B. The writer affirms that, “solid food is for _____ even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to _____

CHAPTER SIX:

31. What did the writer mean by his exhortation for them to leave the “doctrine of the first principles of Christ and press on unto perfection”?
32. Give two of the statements made in chapter six which show that a child of God can fall away and be lost eternally.

- 1.
 - 2.
33. Give two of the statements made in chapter six where the writer expresses confidence in the Hebrews.
- 1.
 - 2.
34. What lesson should we learn from Paul's expression of confidence in the Hebrews?
35. The writer describes Christians as those "who have fled for _____ to lay hold of the hope set before us. Which we have as an_____ • a hope both sure and steadfast and entering into that which is within the_____
36. What is the statement "who have fled for refuge" based on (Ex.21:12-14, Dt. 19:1-13; Josh.20:1-9)?
37. What is the meaning of "entering into that which is within the veil?"

CHAPTER SEVEN:

38. What is the meaning of the statement about Melchizedek that he was "without father
without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life"?
39. How does the writer go about showing how Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, and the Levitical priesthood?
- 1.
 - 2.
40. What does the Old Testament tell us about Melchizedek (Gen. 14:17-2.0; Ps.. 110:4)?

41 .Give three ways that the priesthood of Christ is greater than the Levitical priesthood.

1.

2.

3.

42. The writer says that a change in the priesthood brought about what other change, and why?

CHAPTER EIGHT:

43. What does he mean by the statement that Christ is a “minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man” (Ex. 25:8-9, 40:16-17, 34-38; Mt. 16:13-19; I Tim. 3:14-15; I Cor. 3:16-17)

44. What book and chapter is the long quotation in chapter eight about the new covenant taken from?

45. Hebrews 8:10-12 points out what two great differences between the Old and New Covenants? (Isa.54:13; Jn. 6:45-46, 32:1-7; I Pet. 1:22-23; Jas. 1:18; Phil. 3:20-21;

Heb. 10:1-4, 7:24-25, 9:11-15)?

1.

2.

CHAPTER N1NE:

46. The Tabernacle had two compartments, the and the _____.

47. What holy vessels were in the first compartment of the tabernacle (Heb. 9:2; Ex. 40:21.-27)?

B. The second compartment?

48. What were the three items inside the ark of the covenant?
49. What was the purpose of the pot of manna (Ex. 16:31-34)?
50. When did Aaron's rod bud, and why was it put in the ark (Nu. 16:31—17:13)?
51. What was in the ark of the covenant when it was placed in the temple that Solomon built (I K. 8:4,9-11)?
52. The divisions of the tabernacle, and the requirements concerning the entering of the second signified what (Heb. 9:7-8; Lev. 16:1-30)?
53. What significant thing happened when Christ died that had to do with this, and why? (Mt.27:50-54; Mk.16:37-39; Lu. 23:44- 48; Heb. 6:19-20, 10:19-20)
54. What does the writer mean when he says that Christ “entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands”?
55. List two things that writer teaches about the death of Christ in chapter nine.
 - 1.
 - 2.

CHAPTER TEN:

56. What does he say about the Old Testament Law and animal blood in chapter ten?
 - 1.
 - 2.
57. Why couldn't animal blood make complete atonement for sin? (Isa.53:7-10; Rom. 3:24-25)?
58. How do we know that this book was written before 70 AD. (Heb.8:4-5, 10:11-13)?
 - 1.

2.

59. List two things that the writer says about the “new and living way.”

1.

2.

60. He exhorts them to consider one another to provoke unto _____ as _____

not forsaking _____ but _____ one another and _____.

61. If the writer was referring to the destruction of Jerusalem as the “day approaching (KJV) or drawing nigh” (ASV) are we still under Heb. 10:24-25? See also Heb.3:12-14. Give reason for your answer.

62. What does he say about those who sin willfully?

63. Is a child of God sinning wilfully when he wilfully and deliberately does not assemble with the saints to worship on the Lord’s day (Mk.16:9; Heb.10:24-25; I Cor.16.-I-2. ,1 1:33; Acts 20:7)?

64. Does Heb. 10:26 mean that it is impossible to receive forgiveness for any wilful sin? Give the reading of one or two of the newer versions, New American Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version, New International Version.

65. How do those readings compare with the different readings of several versions on I Jn. 3:9-10? Note especially I Jn. 3:9.

66. Is it very dangerous for a child of God to decide “on this Lord’s day I am going to miss the assembly of the saints in order to get double time pay for my work” or “I deserve a day at the lake?” What will it cause (Lu.8:13-14)?

67. The writer says that the above sinners are doing what?

68. Is it a fearful thing for a faithful Christians to ”fall into the hands of the living God” (1 Pet. 1:10-11; Phil. 1:23; Rev. 14:12-13)?

69. Were these brethren being subjected to severe persecution at this time (Heb. 10:32-38; 12:1-6)?
70. The writer said, “For ye have need of _____ that, having done the-will of God, ye may _____.
71. The writer affirms that the “righteous one shall live by _____ and if he shrinks back _____.”
B. How does he then express his confidence in them?

CHAPTER ELEVEN.

72. According to Heb. 11:6. What kind of faith must one have to please God?
- 1.
 - 2.
73. What did Abel do by faith, and what does this prove about the offerings of Cain and Abel (Gen.4:3-8; Rom.10:17)?
74. How does Abel still speak to us?
75. List three things that the writer says that Abraham did by faith.
- 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
76. What did Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob confess, and what did they manifest by their confession?
77. What did Abraham believe in respect to the offering of his son Isaac as an offering?
78. How did Joseph manifest his faith “when his end was nigh” (Gen.15:12-16; 50:24-26)?
79. Discuss the choice that Moses made “when he was grown up”.

80. How old was Moses at the time, and what else did Stephen say about him (Ex. 2:11-15; Acts 7:21-30)?

1.

2.

81. What does Heb. 11:30-31 tell us about the kind of faith that brings salvation (Joshua

2:1-21, Jas. 2:25; Joshua 6:1-27)?

1.

2.

CHAPTER TWELVE:

82. What does he mean by the admonition to “lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us” (Heb.3:6, 13-19, 4:2,4:11, 10:25-38, 11:6, 12:3-13)?

1.

2.

83. What is the primary difference between parental discipline and that which is administered by the Lord?

84. What are the two things that we are to follow after according to Heb. 12:14-16?

85. What is the writer referring to in Heb. 12:18-21 (*Ex.19:9-25*)?

86. List four things that he says that they had come to, and give the meaning.

1.

2.

3.

4.

87. What did the writer say that the Hebrew Christians had received ““that cannot be shaken””?

B. What is the relationship of this statement and Daniel 2:44?

88. Every Christian should offer service to God with _____ and
_____ for our God is a
_____.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN:

89. In this last chapter the writer gives a number of exhortations concerning ““every day”” _____.

90. (1.) He admonished; “Let _____ continue.”

(2). “Forget not to show love unto _____. for there some have
_____.

(3).. “Remember them that are in _____ as
_____ with them.”

(4). “Let marriage be had in _____ and let the bed be undefiled:
for
_____ and _____ God will
_____.

(5). “Be ye free from the love of _____; content with
_____ :for himself hath said, I will in
no wise _____ thee---- nor _____.

(6). “Remember them that _____ men that spoke unto you
_____ and considering the issue of their life,
_____ their faith”.

(7). “Jesus Christ is the same _____ and _____ •and

yea _____.

(8). “Be not carried away with divers and strange

_____ (9). “We have an _____ where of they have no right to eat that serve at the _____

(10) “Let us therefore go forth unto him _____ bearing _____.

(11). “For we have not here an _____ but we seek after _____

(12) “Through him then let us offer a sacrifice of _____ that is, _____ .

(13) “But to do good and to _____ forget not: for with such _____

God is_____

(14) “Obey them that have the _____ over you and submit; for they _____.

91. How does 13:18, 13:24, 13:25 indicate that the first recipients of this letter knew who it was from, and that it was probably Paul?

1.

2.

92. What does he say about what he had written to them?

93. What does he say about Timothy, and what person in Christ had the most association with Timothy?

94. The writer sent salutations from what people, and how would this fit Paul as the writer of the Epistle?

95. How does the closing salutation compare with Paul’s other books?

The Letter of James

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including

The Proto-Gospel of James

The Secret Book of James

(for information only)

The **Proto-Gospel of James** is sometimes called a “Proto-Gospel” because it narrates events that took place prior to Jesus’ birth (although it includes an account of the birth as well.) Ancient manuscripts that preserve the book have different titles, including “The Birth of Mary,” “The Story of the Birth of Saint Mary, Mother of God,” and “The Birth of Mary; The Revelation of James.” Its author claims to be James usually understood to be Jesus’ (half-) brother known from the New Testament (e.g., Mark 6; Galatians 1). Here he is assumed to be Joseph’s son by a previous marriage.

The **Secret Book (or Apocryphon) of James** is a text known about like the Letter of Peter to Philip, within the frame of an introductory letter as a secret book with sayings of Jesus that his followers remembered.

Note: Much of the information on the above two manuscripts may be found in the standard sources, such as New Testament and various Introductions, commentaries on James, and Bible encyclopaedias. The material here is compiled largely from these sources and so is not copyrighted.

Introduction to the Letter of James

Of the three apostles who comprised the inner circle of Jesus' disciples (Peter, James and John), we know the least about the apostle James. We do know, however, that the apostle James was the eldest brother of the apostle John and that their father's name was Zebedee (their mother's name was Salome.)

James does not come to us with a clear-cut traditional date, since the book does not mention any historical events or people other than the author in James 1:1. Although strong connections to some of the sayings of Jesus can be seen in verses like 5:12, “let your yes be yes” (compare Matt 5:37), it is probably impossible to say whether or not James has a literary dependence on Matthew or any other New Testament book, so the book's date stands essentially independent from the rest of the New Testament.

I. The Author

The traditional understanding of authorship is that the book was penned by James, the brother of Jesus and head of the Jerusalem church. Since James was executed in 62 A.D., that would be the latest possible date for the book. Evidence for authorship by this James, as opposed to another Christian by that name or by someone writing in his name, is good. No one else but the head of the Jerusalem church could write a letter to a large audience ("the twelve tribes scattered abroad" – 1:1) and call himself simply "James", without further clarification. There are also verbal parallels between the book of James and the words of James recorded in Acts 15. Within the New Testament, the salutation used in both passages is unique to James (author to recipients: "greetings" – Acts 15:23, James 1:1). Compare also Acts 15:13 with James 2:5, Acts 15:17 with James 2:7, Acts 15:29 with James 1:27.

So, in keeping with the ancient custom, the author of the letter identifies himself at the very beginning. But in a sense, the author here is not very specific in his identification of himself. James 1:1 merely reads, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." This does tell us, though, that whoever this James was, he was well known to the readers. Further, only a cursory reading of the epistle reveals that he was a man highly esteemed among them, one who stood in a position of recognized spiritual authority, and one whom they were obliged to obey. Assuming that the critical view (namely, that the book was pseudepigraphal, written by someone who deceptively took the name James) is in error, the following four men named James in the NT provide for us a list of the possibilities.

Several things are clear from the internal evidence of the book. First, unlike many of the other books of the New Testament which seem to have been written in Rome or Asia Minor, James clearly has a setting in the land of Israel. The term "former and latter rain" (3:7) addresses a weather concern unique to Israel and regions closely adjacent. James is the only book in the Bible outside of the gospels to use "gehenna" for "hell". Gehenna was a valley outside Jerusalem where trash was burned. Verses like 3:11-12 fit with Israeli geography and farming culture.

A. Survey of the Choices

1. James the son of Zebedee and brother of John

This man was the most prominent "James" in the gospels. He was one of the "sons of thunder," originally a fisherman with John (his brother), along with Peter and Andrew. He became a disciple of Jesus and was later martyred by Herod Agrippa I, as recorded in Acts 12:2 (circa A.D. 44). There is not much chance that this James could have written this letter before he was killed, and there is no tradition arguing that he did.

2. James the son of Alphaeus, another disciple

Very little is known about this James, the brother of Matthew (Levi). He was another disciple of our Lord, but again, there is no hint that he is the one who wrote this epistle.

3. James the father of Judas the disciple (Judas Thaddaeus)

This man is even more obscure. Not a likely candidate.

4. James the brother of Jude and half-brother of our Lord

This seems to be the author of our letter. He is not so identified, but much about his character is revealed that is in keeping with what is known about him. This choice is also in keeping with tradition which tells us that he remained in Jerusalem and that Peter, James, and John chose James, the brother of Jesus to be the pastor of the Jerusalem church after the ascension of Christ (cf. Clement of Alexandria). The fact that he does not so identify himself (as our Lord's brother) may be an indication of his humility, but it also reveals the standing and personal authority he had in the opinion of his readers. He was a man well known and highly esteemed in the new Christian community. "James, a servant of God and of Jesus Christ" was an entirely sufficient identification to them. The brevity of it only makes the author obscure to the modern reader.

B. Biographical Sketch

James is first introduced in Matthew 13:55 as one of our Lord's brethren. John 7:5 relates the sad fact that even as late as six months before the crucifixion (the feast of tabernacles), James was still an unbeliever. I Cor. 15:7 tells us that in the midst of the resurrection appearances of Christ, "He was seen of James." A little later, a number of people are recorded as meeting for prayer with the apostles in the upper room, as they awaited Pentecost; among them were "Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brethren." In Gal. 1:18-19 Paul is describing the events of his life following his three years in Arabia after his conversion; at this time he spent two weeks with Peter in Jerusalem and also met another important church leader by the names of James, who "was the Lord's brother." By the time of Acts 12:17 James was evidently already a leader in the Jerusalem church, for Peter, released from prison, asks that the news be reported to James. In Acts 15:13 James is the one presiding at the great council of Jerusalem which met to decide the important question of the relationship of Christianity to the Mosaic law; his leadership role is evident. In Gal. 2:9 Paul refers to him as a "pillar" of the church—equal to Peter and John. So far James has come from his unbelief! The remaining references to James (Gal. 2:12-13 & Acts 21:18-19) reveal his zeal for the Mosaic law. He was evidently in firm agreement with the decision of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:13-19), but he was also careful to keep peace between the Gentile believers and the more "legalistic"(?) Jewish Christians

(verse 20). Perhaps he himself (as Peter, cf. Gal. 2:11) carried this matter too far; this does not minimize his standing as an apostle, however (Gal. 1:19). (Note: At least four other men beside the original 11 have apostolic status: Matthias [Acts 1:26], Barnabas [Acts 14:4, 14], Paul, and James.) He was "nicknamed" "James the Just" because of his recognized piety, and was said to have "knees like those of camels" because of his much time spent in prayer. Josephus records that James was martyred during an uprising against Christians while Ananus was high priest in 62 A.D.

II. The Date

Liberal scholars assign a very late date to the epistle of James (A.D. 85-130), but the evidence demands a much earlier date than that. It would seem that an event as important as the fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) would have been somehow evident in such a Jewish writing, had it yet occurred. Further, if we are correct in assigning this letter to James the brother of our Lord, the writing would obviously have been before A.D. 62, the time of his death. Moreover, the very elementary church order reflected in the epistle points to a very early date: there are no bishops or deacons mentioned at all, and the meeting place of the church is still the "synagogue" (James 2:2 "assembly," Greek, *sunagoge*). The opinion of the ancient church was also in keeping with an early date of writing, for in their arrangement of the books of the NT James is placed before the Pauline epistles. Added to all this, the obvious Jewish tone of the letter, the very thin line which appears to exist between Judaism and Christianity, the absence of developed Christian phraseology, the lack of elaborated Christian doctrine, no mention at all of the later conflict between the Jewish demands upon the Gentiles within the church or of circumcision or of the Jerusalem council of A.D. 49 (i.e., Christianity is still wearing its "Jewish diapers," and there is yet no Gentile prominence within the church)—all point to a date of writing sometime around A.D. 46. This, then, is the earliest of all the NT books, the "First Epistle To the Christians." But prepare yourself for the study of it—as it has been well said, while James is ancient, it is not musty!

III. The Recipients

The letter is addressed "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1b). "Twelve tribes," obviously, identifies the readers as Jewish, and "of the dispersion" (diaspora) further identifies them as those Jews living outside of Palestine. The fact that the letter was written in Greek (rather than Aramaic) seems further to specify those living in the Western area of the dispersion (e.g., Syria), which was an early center of Christian evangelistic outreach (Acts 11:19). James further identifies them as "brethren" having "the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2:1). Adding up the evidence specifies the recipients as early Jewish believers outside of Palestine. (James' influence was far-reaching!) The letter was written from an apostle in Jerusalem to the Christian Jews abroad.

As such, the content of James is very strictly Jewish, and some have noted that if verses 1:1 and 2:1 were removed, the book could almost (though not quite) pass as a sermon from a non-Christian Jew. Certainly there is no evidence of any break between Judaism and Christianity. Abraham is described as "our father" (2:21), with no effort made to differentiate between physical and spiritual lineage. The book has no mention of any gentiles. Likewise, there is no mention of any of the issues associated with gentile involvement in the church, such as idolatry, food offered to idols, fellowship between Jewish and gentile Christians, etc. This, as an argument from silence, would seem to date the book prior to the Jerusalem conference of 50 A.D. A date of around 48 would seem reasonable.

IV. The Style

This epistle (letter) is in many ways very different from the other NT letters. It often sounds more like a sermon preached and recorded by a stenographer! More than likely, the letter was intended to be read publicly at the meetings of the churches to whom it was sent. What follows is a brief sketch of some of its chief characteristics.

A. Literary Devices and Techniques

1. Duadiplosis (paronomasia)

This literary device is a subtle but effective method of emphasizing a point by linking together clauses and sentences or ideas by repeating its key words. For instance, in James 1:3-4 "patience" is emphasized—"the trying of your faith worketh patience, but let patience have its perfect work." Verses 4-5 emphasize the thought of maturity in the negative—"no lack." Verses 5-6 speak of "asking." See also "temptation" (verses 12-14), "lust" (14-15), "wrath" (19-20), etc. Remaining alert to these will often be an aid to interpretation.

2. Figures of Speech — chiefly metaphor & simile

Metaphors and similes are methods of comparison, speaking of one thing in terms of another. James employs these figures from all areas of life:

a. Rural Life

He speaks of earthly prosperity as a flower that withers (1:10), speech as a spring and a tree (3:11), righteousness as fruit (3:18), life as a fog that is soon gone (4:14), etc.

b. Marine Life and Astronomy

A man who cannot make up his mind to trust God is compared to a wave of the sea (1:6). God, the source of good gifts is unchanging as the sun (1:17). etc.

c. Domestic Life

The development and result of sin is likened to conception, birth, growth, and death (1:15). The careless listener is likened to the man who doesn't look into the mirror very well (1:23). In 4:4 unfaithfulness is compared to adultery. etc.

d. Public Life

The future bliss of believers is compared to receiving the victor's "crown" (1:12). Hedonistic pleasures are like a hostile army encamped in our body (4:1). etc.

3. Illustrations

Most of James' illustrations are taken from the normal experiences of everyday life. He often refers, to illustrate a point, to wind, flowers, sun, vapor, farming. There is more poetic imagery in James' short epistle than in all of Paul's epistles combined. (Maybe he learned it from his mother, cf. Lk.1).

4. Rhetorical Questions

James often asks questions which answer themselves. Few things are as effective in argument as forcing someone to answer an obvious question. James does this repeatedly (e.g., 2:4, 5, 6, 7, 14, 16, 20, 21 etc.)

5. Excellent Greek

Greek scholars agree that the Greek written in the original of James is the best in the entire NT, except for the book of Hebrews. He seems to have been a well-educated man.

6. Plain and Direct

The net effect of all this is that his letter comes across as plainly, vividly, and directly as any possibly could. With his fervency, poetical imagery, illustrations, questions, and superior use of language in general, there is never a reason for misunderstanding him. With James, the issues are never abstract but real and familiar and very personal.

B. Other Characteristics

1. Authoritative

James does not hesitate to tell you what you should do. You can't even read the letter casually without recognizing that James preaches to us from a superior position. He commands and even rebukes and never apologizes for it. No OT prophet ever spoke with more authority. In this brief letter of 108 verses there are 54 imperatives (commands).

2. Practical

It is evident that James' purpose is not to instruct us merely in what to believe but in what we should do because of what we believe.

3. Relevant

The personal issues which James deals with are as contemporary as tomorrow's news!

4. Jewish

Addressed to the twelve tribes of the dispersion, the whole mental atmosphere of the letter is Jewish. Almost every subject in the letter is emphasized in the Old Testament, the Tanahk, and there is almost no distinctively Christian teaching. The meeting place is the synagogue (2:1), Abraham is their father (2:21), God is called The Lord of Sabbaoth (5:4, only time in NT), His illustrations are often from the OT, and the whole approach is that of an OT prophet. It is the most Jewish writing of the NT.

5. Different from Paul

Much has been made of James' difference from Paul. The two apostles each begin their letters with a salutation, but the similarity seems, at times, to end there. This is true, to some extent, in regard to style as well as content. Martin Luther's opinions about James are well known (as are most of Luther's opinions!). "It is a right strawy epistle," he said, because of James' emphasis on works rather than faith. (In typical Luther fashion: "At the University of Wittenburg, we fire our stoves with the epistle of James.") This is simply a misunderstanding of James, and Luther is said to have moderated his views later in life. This misunderstanding stems from a failure to recognize the issues in focus in James and Paul—they are not standing face to face fighting each other but back to back fighting different enemies. Paul attacks the idea that a man can be saved by works and so emphasizes faith. James attacks the idea that a man's faith may be dead (i.e., unproductive) yet real, and so James emphasizes works. The two men are not contradictory but complementary to each other.

6. Identical to Paul

For the record, it should be understood that everything James says is also found in the writings of Paul. Compare Rom. 2:6-10 & Eph. 2:8-10 to James 2:1, 5, & 23. Also, it should be noted that the two often use the same terminology with different meanings. The "works" Paul attacks are those which pretend to save; the "works" James demands are those which demonstrate salvation.

7. Similar to Jesus

It has been said that if John rested on Jesus' bosom, James sat at his feet. James preserves more of Christ's teaching than all the other epistles combined.

He never actually quotes his older brother, but he seems to constantly refer to his teachings as a basis for his own. There are at least 10 parallels to Jesus' sermon on the mount, and for almost everything we read in James we can recall some statement of Jesus which may have suggested it. This is so pervasive that even when the parallels fail, many are inclined to suspect that James may be repeating some unrecorded teaching of our Lord. This is all the more interesting seeing that James was an unbeliever until after Jesus' resurrection. (Cf. Mt. 5:48 & James 1:4, Mt. 7:7 & James 1:5, Mk. 11:23 & James 1:6, Mt. 7:24-26 & James 1:22, Mt. 7:1 & James 4:11-12, Mt. 23:12 & James 4:10, Mt. 7:16 & James 3:12, etc.)

V. Its Canonicity

When the ancient church sat to determine which writings were Inspired and so to be included in the "Canon" of Holy Scripture, the epistle of James faced some problems. It was a part of the antilegomena — books "disputed" by at least some section of the Church. The ancient church historian, Eusebius (265-340) records this for us, although he himself accepted James. The problems were provoked basically by two considerations, much later by a third. The first problem was its relative obscurity—the letter had remained for some time unknown to a good many churches, especially those in Africa. This problem was resolved by the consideration that the letter was addressed only to a specific locality and people; furthermore, it finally became evident that the letter was more widely recognized than previously thought. The second problem was its questionable authorship even after the book had become more widely known. They questioned who the writer was and what was his authority for doing so (i.e., his apostleship). With the author identified & its wide acceptance, these doubts were settled by the fourth century, and at the third council of Carthage (397) it became universally recognized. James suffered no further problems until Martin Luther questioned it on the grounds of a supposed conflict with Paul (see above).

VI. Its Position in the Canon

Although James was written before Paul's letters, it has been placed after Paul's for several reasons, perhaps the best of which is the fact that Paul's are a more complete and systematic presentation of Christian Truth, and James is therefore supplementary to Paul. It falls into a group of NT books called the General ("catholic") Epistles (Hebrews-Jude). They are called "General" because the authors & audiences are varied.

VII. Survey

The burden of James' letter is to exhort us to consistent Christian living. He does this by dealing with many dangers which face us (problems which can lead us into sin) and by exhorting us to proper Christian virtues. One by one these

issues are handled, and we are instructed in regard to them. The subjects which James takes up are as follows.

- A. Trials
- B. Temptations
- C. Hypocrisy
- D. Partiality
- E. Empty Faith
- F. Tongue
- G. Worldly Wisdom
- H. Sin
- I. Slander
- J. Self-Confidence
- K. Injustice
- L. Prayer
- M. The Erring Brother

VIII. Summary

It often seems that any attempt to outline the book of James is futile. Discovering the major divisions of the letter is a task which has seen many give up. But however the book is divided, it must be kept in mind that James' purpose is simply to exhort us in matters of daily Christian living. The following is one humble attempt to summarize that exhortation.

A. The Christian Attitude

- 1. Toward Trials
- 2. Toward Temptations
- 3. Toward the Word
- 4. Toward Others

B. The Christian Faith

- 1. The Demonstration of It
- 2. The Illustrations of It

C. The Christian Life

- 1. The Dangers
 - a. The Tongue
 - b. The World
 - c. The Flesh
 - d. Injustice
- 2. The Virtues
 - a. Patience
 - b. Prayer

IX. Purpose, Theme of the Letter

James is concerned to show us the proper "behaviour of belief"; that is, his letter consists of a series of tests of our faith. What we profess to believe, he insists, must be evident by how we live. The issues he takes up, then, are not trivial—these things tell on us! A man is saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is not alone!

X. Remarks of Historians and Early Church Fathers

James “the brother of the Lord” was indeed widely known. (Galatians 1:19) The Jewish historian Josephus mentions his death as taking place at the order of Ananus, one of the five sons of Ananus (Annas) who held the office of high priest. This younger Ananus was a very arrogant man who, like the other members of the sect of the Sadducees, was very harsh in judging offenders. After the Roman governor Festus had died and his replacement Albinus was on the way to Judea, Ananus seized the opportunity to exercise his authority. He assembled the Sanhedrin and “brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others.” After Ananus had formulated an accusation against them as violators of the law, he handed them over to be stoned to death. (*Antiquities*, XX, ix, 1)

Ananus did not have the authority to act in this manner, and certain Jews undertook to meet Albinus before his arrival in Judea to inform him about what had taken place. Albinus then wrote to Ananus, threatening to have him punished. Subsequently, Herod Agrippa II, who then had the authority to appoint the Jewish high priests, deposed Ananus after he had served as high priest for just three months. (*Antiquities*, XX, ix, 1)

It appears that James came to believe in Jesus as the promised Messiah or Christ when he appeared to him after his resurrection. (1 Corinthians 15:7; compare John 7:3-5.) Although he became a devoted disciple, James continued to live according to the requirements of the Mosaic law among the Jews in Jerusalem and so appears to have been held in high regard, as the complaint made against the actions of Ananus may imply. (Compare Acts 21:18-26.) An account from Hegesippus (second century CE) quoted by Eusebius indicates that James lived like a Nazarite. The account of Hegesippus implies that, as a Nazarite, James had priestly privileges. To what extent Hegesippus preserved a reliable tradition about him cannot be determined, and his account has little in common with that of Josephus.

According to Eusebius, Hegesippus wrote about James in his fifth book: “He was holy from his mother’s womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh. No razor came upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, and he did not use the bath. He alone was permitted to enter into the holy place;

for he wore not woollen but linen garments. And he was in the habit of entering alone into the temple, and was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his constantly bending them in his worship of God, and asking forgiveness for the people.” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book II, xxiii, 5, 6)

On account of the testimony of James, numerous Jews came to believe in Jesus. The unbelieving Jews were disturbed and feared that the danger existed that all the people would come to regard Jesus as the promised Messiah or Christ. So, according to Hegesippus, they approached James, saying to him: “Restrain the people; for they have gone astray in regard to Jesus, as if he were the Christ. We entreat you to persuade all who have come to the Passover festival concerning Jesus; for all of us have confidence in you. For we bear you witness, as do all the people, that you are just, and do not respect persons. Therefore, persuade the multitude not to be led astray concerning Jesus. For the whole people, and all of us also, have confidence in you. Stand therefore upon the pinnacle of the temple, that from that high position you may be clearly seen, and that your words may be readily heard by all the people. For all the tribes, with the Gentiles also, have come together on account of the Passover.” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book II, xxiii, 10, 11)

Certain scribes and Pharisees then had James stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and cried out to him, “You just one, in whom we ought all to have confidence, forasmuch as the people are led astray after Jesus, the crucified one, declare to us, What is the gate of Jesus?” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book II, xxiii, 12 [The reference to the “gate of Jesus” may relate to Jesus’ words, “I am the gate of the sheep.” (John 10:7)])

James reportedly answered with a loud voice, “Why do you ask me concerning Jesus, the Son of Man? He himself sits in heaven at the right hand of the great Power, and is about to come upon the clouds of heaven.” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book II, xxiii, 13)

The same scribes and Pharisees then regretted that they had arranged for James to give his testimony and decided to throw him down. The fall did not kill him, and so they determined to stone him to death, saying, “Let us stone James the Just.” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book II, xxiii, 14-16)

Josephus and Hegesippus are in agreement that a decision was made to stone James to death, but they do not corroborate any of the specifics in either of their accounts. Eusebius, although quoting from Josephus’s *Antiquities*, Book XX, provided no explanation regarding the differences. He, however, did add regarding this James, “These things are recorded in regard to James, who is said to be the author of the first of the so-called catholic epistles [likely meaning the

first of the seven (James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude) to be written]. But it is to be observed that it is disputed; at least, not many of the ancients have mentioned it, as is the case likewise with the epistle that bears the name of Jude, which is also one of the seven so-called catholic epistles. Nevertheless we know that these also, with the rest, have been read publicly in very many churches.” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book II, xxiii, 25)

Many have thought that the expressions about the importance of works in the letter of James do not agree with Paul’s words that being justified (or being granted an approved standing with God) is not possible on the basis of works. There is, however, no real contradiction. Paul repeatedly emphasized the need for believers to live upright lives, always letting love guide their actions. Like James, Paul urged them to speak and act in a manner that harmonized with their faith in God and Christ. (Romans 12:1, 2; 13:8-14; 14:15; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 6:9-11; 10:31-33; 13:1-7; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Galatians 5:16-21; 6:7-10; Ephesians 4:20-5:20; Colossians 3:5-14; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)

Whereas James highlighted works as an essential evidence of a living faith that made one acceptable to God, Paul made it clear that the existence of the faith on the basis of which one gains an approved standing with God is productive of upright conduct or good works. (James 2:14-26; Galatians 5:13-25; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 5:9, 10) God’s declaring individuals guiltless on the basis of their faith in his Son and his Son’s sacrificial death for them, however, is an expression of his gracious favor and is not something that can be earned by works. This aspect is not the focus of the letter James wrote. His objective was to admonish believers who had been justified or had come to have a divinely approved standing as members of the true Israel, the people of God. They needed to be concerned about having a living faith, a faith that revealed itself by works of love and compassion for others. (James 2:19-26)

Such an active faith was also essential for them to remain loyal to God and Christ when subjected to trials. As persons with genuine faith, believers would persevere in prayer, petitioning their heavenly Father to sustain them in their trials and to grant them the needed wisdom to deal with the distressing circumstances they faced. (James 1:2-8)

XI. Key Verse

James 2:17 states the theme very well—"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

Commentary on the Book of James

James 1: 1-27

1:1-4. The purpose of trials

Verse 1. The author.

As a proper name, the English form “James” is not the best representation for the Greek *Jákobos* or the Hebrew *Ya’qov* (Jacob). This name was common among the Jews, indicating that the writer of the letter was known so well that his original readers would not have been puzzled about who had sent it. James identified himself as a “slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,” thereby acknowledging that he belonged to both and that he had been granted the inestimable honour of being in their service and accountable to them. The letter is addressed to the “twelve tribes in the dispersion.” This suggests that James regarded all the believers in Jesus Christ who lived in various parts of the Greco-Roman world as part of the real Israel, God’s true people. The apostle Paul expressed himself similarly, referring to non-Jewish believers as having been grafted into the olive tree that had its roots in the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (1:1; Romans 11:11-24; see the Notes section.)

The Greek term rendered “greetings” (*chaírein*, a form of *chaíro*) often appears at the beginning of other ancient letters. This expression, a form of the verb meaning “rejoice” (*chaíro*), is a greeting that wishes one well. (1:1)

Verses 2-4. His message

James addressed believers as “brothers,” fellow members of the family of God’s beloved children. He encouraged them to regard the trials they might face as “all joy.” The encounter with trials would be unexpected and could be in the form of persecution, sickness, or hardships resulting from adverse circumstances. In themselves, all trials are distressing and unpleasant. From the standpoint of the spiritual benefits they could gain from faithfully enduring their various trials, however, believers could face them with joy. (1:2)

They knew that trials would test their faith in God and Christ and that, when subjected to testing, their faith could produce endurance. Their faith would enable them to bear up patiently under the distressing situation while they looked confidently to their heavenly Father to sustain them by means of his spirit. (1:3)

To have a faith that has survived testing, believers need to let the trial take its full course without becoming bitter, resentful, disheartened, or ready to give up.

By thus remaining steadfast, they would allow endurance to develop fully (literally, “let endurance have perfect work”). With a tested faith that has endured distress to the very end, believers would be “perfect” or complete, “whole” or sound in every respect, with “nothing lacking.” They would be in possession of a stronger faith, a tested capacity for steadfast endurance, and enhanced compassion and concern for others who are experiencing affliction. (1:4)

1:5-12. Wisdom for trials

Verses 5-8. The need and supply of wisdom for trials.

In the context of this letter, the lack in wisdom would relate to one’s not knowing how to deal with a particular trial. If any believers found themselves to be lacking in wisdom, they should ask “the giving God” for it. His giving is described as *haplós*, a Greek adverb that can mean “sincerely,” “openly,” “generously,” “ungrudgingly,” or “without reservation.” His giving is also without reproaching, berating, or disparaging. His spirit would never engender within believers who make their petitions for wisdom any feelings of unworthiness, guilt, being foolish, or having imposed on him with too many requests. God is not like humans who tend to become irritated when they are repeatedly asked for aid by persons who never seem to be able to help themselves. Believers can be confident that God will give them the wisdom for which they petition him. (1:5)

When praying to God, they should do so “in faith, not doubting [form of *diakrínō*.]” The Greek verb *diakrínō* can mean to “evaluate,” “judge,” or “differentiate.” Persons who doubt are at odds with themselves, differentiating one course from another but still unable to determine just what they should do. When asking “in faith,” believers would be doing so with the confidence that God’s answer will be in keeping with what they truly need. A doubter, on the other hand, would be “like a wave of the sea, driven by wind and tossed about.” Waves are unstable, and so are doubters when they are faced with distressing circumstances comparable to wind. Plagued by doubts, they do not allow themselves to trust fully in the wisdom that God generously supplies. They yield to the pressure that the changing external circumstances produce. (1:6)

A man who doubts should not expect to receive anything from the Lord to whom his petitions are addressed. As one who is at odds with himself, such a man would not be receptive to the wisdom that God grants generously. The doubter does not really trust God and engages in an internal battle with godly wisdom, for the external circumstances sway his thinking in various directions. (1:7)

The doubter is double-minded (literally, “double-souled”), “unstable in all his ways.” He is like two persons, with divided loyalties, and not single-minded in his devotion to God and earnest desire to do his will. In all his ways or actions, the doubter is unstable or unsteady. He cannot be relied upon for adhering to a divinely approved course, for the ever-changing external circumstances continue to influence his attitude, words, and deeds. (1:8)

Verses 9-12. The rewards of exercising wisdom in trials

- (1) Wisdom enables the brother of ‘humble circumstances’ to see and rejoice in his high and exalted position as Christ’s own, having a place of eminence and dignity with his Saviour.
- (2) Wisdom enables the rich brother, on the other hand, to see and rejoice in his lowliness apart from his salvation, the low estate of all his wealth apart from God (Isaiah 57:15) in the light of transiency of mortal life and material possessions.

Believers found themselves in a variety of situations, with many being poor while some among them prospered materially. Whatever their circumstances proved to be, they needed to avoid becoming preoccupied with what they possessed or did not possess from a material standpoint. The “lowly brother,” one of limited means and an inferior social status, had little control of his life. From a spiritual standpoint, though, he could “boast” or glory in “his exaltation.” Upon putting faith in Jesus Christ and what his sacrificial death accomplished, the lowly believer gained the dignified standing of a beloved “son” or child of God. He came to be an heir with Christ, assured of receiving all the privileges and blessings that are associated with this heirship. In the family of God’s children, the “lowly brother” does not have an inferior standing but has the same dignity as all the other “sons,” for Christ alone is the “firstborn,” the preeminent one. Accordingly, the “lowly brother” had good reason for taking pride in what God through Christ had done for him. (1:9; Romans 8:16, 17, 29; Galatians 3:28, 29; Ephesians 3:6)

A wealthy brother should boast or glory in his humiliation. Before coming to be a believer, he enjoyed an honourable standing in the Greco-Roman world. As a possessor of significant means, he was respected and exercised considerable control over his personal affairs. Upon putting faith in Jesus Christ, he identified himself with a body of people whom unbelievers viewed with contempt. Moreover, the wealthy brother also came to recognize that the standing he enjoyed on account of his possessions rested on a false foundation, a foundation that had no permanence. This resulted in a different view of himself, one that was not based on his riches. Apart from his possessions, he was no different from any other person, and so he was humbled. (1:10)

Wealth is transitory, and so a rich man (from the standpoint of his identity as it relates to his possessions) perishes like a beautiful flower that fades and withers. His identity is just as transitory as the riches on which it is based. (1:10; see the Notes section.)

In the case of vegetation, the scorching heat from the risen sun (or the risen sun along with a scorching wind) dried up the grass, and “the blossom [‘its blossom,’ according to other manuscripts] fell, and the beauty of its appearance [literally, ‘face’] perished; so also the rich man will wither away in his ways.” It does not take long for the sun’s intense heat to dry up the grass. Especially does this happen quickly when a scorching wind accompanies the intense heat from the rays of the summer sun. Faded, dried-up blossoms drop from their stems. Nothing remains of the former beauty of the flowers. Likewise, it proves to be with the rich man as he carries out his pursuits. The time comes when his life ends, and the flourishing state he enjoyed while dressed in finery and in control of abundant means then fades away. Death parts the wealthy man from all his material possessions. (1:11)

Returning to the subject of trials, James pronounced the man who endured them as being “fortunate,” or in a highly desirable state. This is because the individual’s remaining faithful to God when experiencing trials would result in his receiving the “crown of life.” This “crown” is life itself, which is what God has promised to those who love him. “Life” is the real life of an enduring approved relationship with God (and also with his Son), and receiving the “crown of life” signifies being granted this life. All who love God, demonstrating that love by earnestly seeking to do his will, can be confident about receiving the “crown of life.” The assurance is based on God’s unchangeable promise. (1:12)

1:13-18 God and trials

Verses 13-15. God tempts no one to sin.

When experiencing trials, a believer should not say, “I am being tried by God, for God cannot be tried with evils and does not try anyone.” One’s attributing being tried, tested, or tempted to God could hinder one from regarding him as a loving and caring Father. He is absolutely free from even the slightest taint of defilement and so cannot be tried or tempted with bad, or any kind of moral corruption, to act in a manner that is contrary to his holiness or purity. Therefore, he would never seduce anyone to do wrong, making evil look attractive or desirable to the individual. As a loving Father, he will come to the aid of his beloved children who appeal to him, strengthening them with his spirit to endure the distressing circumstances they may be experiencing at the time. (1:13)

Temptation arises from an individual's own desire, which exerts tremendous pressure to act and has entrapping power. When faced with a distressing situation, a person's natural desire is for relief. If the only discernible avenue of escape from the painful circumstance is one that would be out of harmony with God's upright ways, the desire for relief could build up in individuals to the point of prompting them to consider taking the wrong course and then seduce them to act on it. (1:14)

Once a wrong desire is allowed to grow unchecked, it becomes "fertile" or fully developed. The desire then impels the individual to act on it, thus "giving birth to sin" (a missing of the mark of loyal obedience to God). Nothing good can come from sin, for it always leads to condemnation. So, in its fully developed state, sin breeds death. (1:15; compare Romans 6:23.)

Verses 16-18. God is good to men.

James admonished his "beloved brothers," fellow members of his family of God's children, not to be misled. They should never deceive themselves into thinking that God is the one who tries or tempts them, failing to remember that the source of temptation is an individual's own wrong desire that he has failed to dismiss or resist with the aid God supplies through his spirit. (1:16)

Nothing bad ever comes from God. "From above," from his exalted heavenly realm, only comes the bestowal of good and of every gift that is "perfect," without flaw and exactly what is needed for well-being. This differs from the giving of sinful humans. They may do so with ulterior motives. At times their presents can even be harmful to the recipients. The bountiful good gifts come from a loving Father who deeply cares for his children and whose generosity is pure. (1:17)

He is the "Father of the lights," and so he could never be linked to anything of an evil nature. Corrupt individuals are the ones who try to conceal their actions, often committing their vile deeds under the cover of darkness. God, however, is consistent in never deviating from his being the "Father of the lights" and, therefore, the source of what is truly good and always beneficial to the recipients. As the Creator of the sun, moon, and stars, he is the "Father of lights." (Jeremiah 31:35) He is also the source of enlightenment, of the knowledge that leads to the real life of an enduring relationship with him. (2 Corinthians 4:6) Depending on its perceived position in the sky in relation to the earth, the sun casts shadows and the degree of warmth at various times or locations differs considerably. With God, no such variations exist. There is nothing comparable to the lengthening or shortening of shadows or their appearance and disappearance. God is always dependable, never changing in giving what is good and in the best interests of his beloved children. (1:17)

The approved relationship that believers have with God came about because he willed it. By means of the “word of truth,” he brought them to birth as his children to be a kind of “firstfruits of his creatures.” This “word of truth” is the message about Christ and how, through him and his sacrificial death, humans can be forgiven of their sins and reconciled to his Father as members of his family. It is the “word of truth,” for it is a truthful or wholly dependable message. The individual’s response in faith to this “word” results in a newness of life as a person forgiven of sin and no longer under the condemnation of death. (1:18)

1: 19-25. God’s word and trials

Verses 19-21; God’s goodness and the believer’s responsibility

As a kind of “firstfruits” among God’s creatures, believers are set apart as holy for him and, therefore, objects of his special care. In ancient Israel, the firstfruits were offered to God. Consequently, in being designated as a kind of firstfruits, believers are under obligation to present themselves as an acceptable offering to God, putting their all at his disposal for the doing of his will. (1:18; Romans 12:1)

In every aspect of life (disposition, word, and conduct), believers should behave as God’s obedient children. James exhorted his beloved brothers to be “quick in hearing,” responsive or obedient to divine direction, “slow in speaking, slow in wrath.” (1:19)

Later (in 3:1), James admonished his readers not to be hasty about seeking to be teachers of fellow believers. Possibly this is included in being “slow” to speak, not pushing oneself forward as an instructor of others without really being qualified to do so. (Compare 1 Timothy 1:7.) Other situations calling for being slow to speak would be when such speaking could lead to quarrels and an escalation of personal attacks, or make one a busybody for being too free in giving unsolicited advice. Moreover, before responding to others about significant matters, one should listen carefully and give serious thought before making a reply. (1:19)

Anciently, like today, there was much in the world that could make one angry. Believers had to exercise care that they did not begin to rail angrily against individuals and about injustices. They needed to be patient, not being quick to take offense when others acted in an unfair, unkind, or thoughtless manner. When being corrected or called to account for an indiscretion, many tend to respond in anger. Believers, however, should endeavor to avoid becoming irritated and be willing to acknowledge their error. In verse 21, the reference is to acceptance of the saving “word” or message with “meekness,” or with

humility, not in a spirit of angry resistance. Whenever God's word calls for a change in one's attitude, speech, or conduct, the believer would want to submit readily. (1:19)

Wrath is to be avoided, for it does not produce anything that promotes God's righteousness. Instead, wrath is often the reflection of a justifying or vengeful spirit, and results from a failure to consider that God is the one who will right injustices and judge by means of his Son with absolute impartiality. (1:20)

"Therefore" (that is, because human wrath does not effect divine righteousness but runs counter to it), believers need to cast away "all filthiness" (everything that is impure and repugnant in God's sight) and the "surplus [*perisseia*] of evil." The Greek word *perisseia* can mean "abundance," "surplus," or "excess," and the expression "surplus of evil" could refer to any evil that might still be clinging to believers. Possibly this expression relates to the abundance of evil that is all around believers but which must be banished from their lives. The "evil" could apply to any attitudes, words, or deeds that are unloving or contrary to God's pure and just ways. Translators have variously rendered the expression "surplus of evil" as "wicked excess" (REB), "the evil that is so prevalent" (NIV), "every other evil which touches the lives of others" (J. B. Phillips), and "remnants of evil." (NJB) Everything that is abhorrent and corrupt must be banished from the life of believers in order for them to be transformed by God's word and spirit. (1:21)

Anything that is sordid or corrupt would be resistant to God's word that calls upon believers to conduct themselves as his obedient children who are earnestly seeking to live a life of moral purity. Their getting rid of everything that is morally defiling puts them in a condition where they, with meekness or humility, can be responsive to the "implanted word that is able to save [their] souls." This "word" is the message about Christ, which they initially embraced upon putting faith in him and his sacrificial death for them. As having been embraced by them, this word can be spoken of as the "implanted word." This "implanted word" has the power to save "their souls" or to deliver them as individuals from condemnation, for it reveals what they need to do as God's children to live in a manner that would meet his approval. In keeping with their new status as God's children, they must cease to live a life of sin and to continue living a life of faith, a faith that reveals their love for him and his ways. Their living in this manner requires that they continue to be accepting of the "implanted word," letting it (in conjunction with God's spirit) progressively transform them into the persons their heavenly Father wants them to be as his children, finally to be completely liberated from sin and thereafter to enjoy an enduring relationship with him and his Son as sinless members of his family. (1:21)

Verses 22-25. God's Word and the believer's obedience

The saving power of the “word” or message relating to Christ and his sacrifice depends on the continued obedient response of the believer, a response that reflects meekness or humility. More is required than just respectful listening. James urged, “But become doers of the word, and not hearers only, misleading yourselves.” The message about Christ must be lived, with his example and teaching governing the believer’s disposition, words, and deeds. Persons who merely listen without recognizing their weighty responsibility of living in a manner that honours God and Christ are deceiving themselves. A mere confession of the lips is empty when not backed by corresponding action. (1:22) Jesus Christ made this clear when he said, “But why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46) “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but the one doing the will of my Father [will].” (Matthew 7:21)

James likened a mere “hearer of” or “listener” to the “word” (that is, a person who is not a doer or fails to put what he hears into practice) to a man who looks at his face (literally, “the face of his birth”) in a mirror. The expression “face of his birth” could signify the natural features of the face, with the emphasis being just on the outward or surface appearance. (1:23)

Once the man stops looking at his face in the mirror and then attends to his affairs, he forgets all about the reflected image in the mirror. So it is with individuals who listen to the message about Christ but who are not transformed by it. Outwardly they may profess to believe, but they continue to live their lives as they did formerly, giving no thought to the responsibilities that acceptance of the message imposed on them. Faith in God and Christ does not become the governing principle in their lives. (1:24)

Unlike the mere hearer of the word, the one who listens and acts on what is heard gives the message undivided attention. The Greek verb *parakypto* expresses what he does about the “perfect law of freedom.” This term (*parakypto*) literally means to “bend down beside” or to “bend over” and so is indicative of the special attention one would give when bending over to take a closer look at something. Accordingly, the responsive listener manifests an earnest interest in the “law of freedom.” This “law” is the good news about Christ and what he accomplished when laying down his life sacrificially. As it relates to Christ, the “law” includes what he taught by word and example. For his disciples, his authoritative teaching has the force of law. It is the “law of freedom,” for an obedient response in faith leads to liberation from sin. From the standpoint of attaining its objective and including all that is essential for those who choose to live in harmony with it, it is a “perfect” or flawless law. (1:25)

The responsive listener does more than just give the “perfect law of freedom” his full attention on particular occasions, he “stays” with it, continuing to seek to be guided by it. This “law” proves to be the governing principle of his whole life. So he does not become a “forgetful hearer,” but lets the “law of freedom” guide him in all affairs of life. As a doer of the “work” (the good work that the “law of freedom” prompts and which is a product of genuine love for God, Christ, and fellow humans), the individual will be happy (*makários*) in doing it. The Greek term *makários*, in this context, denotes a state of inner joy and well-being resulting from knowing that one is doing what is pleasing to God. (1:25)

1:26-27 True religion and trials

Verse 26. False religion

A person may think of himself as “religious,” “pious,” or “godly.” If, however, he does not bridle his tongue, he would be guilty of “deceiving his heart.” This would be a serious self-deception, for it involves the “heart” or inmost self. An unbridled tongue expresses what is hurtful and reveals a lack of love for others. All attitudes, words, and actions that are contrary to love violate the “perfect law of freedom.” By word and example, Jesus Christ revealed the kind of self-sacrificing love his disciples must have, and this includes using the tongue in a manner that has a wholesome effect on others. (Matthew 5:43-48; John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 13; Romans 13:8-10; Ephesians 4:29) The person who misuses his tongue may think of himself as godly, but his “piety” or religious profession is empty, bringing no honour to God and Christ. (1:26)

Verse 27. True religion

The “piety” or godliness that “our God and Father” acknowledges as “pure and undefiled is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself spotless from the world.” Everything that is contrary to love is sinful and, therefore, impure and defiling. Those whom God acknowledges as his own respond to the needs of others in a loving and caring way. In the Greco-Roman world, orphans and widows often were greatly impoverished and in need of help. The neglect of such needy ones would have been a heartless act and thus impure and defiling. (1:27)

For believers to keep themselves spotless from the world required that they refrain from conducting themselves like people of the world who are in a state of alienation from God. An uncaring and selfish spirit has no place among those whom God approves. To remain unsullied by the corruption of the world, believers must strive to imitate the love of their heavenly Father and his Son. This is not just a matter of refraining from hurtful acts. It involves actively doing

what one can to respond kindly and compassionately to others, especially to those in need. (1:27)

Notes:

In verse 1, a number of manuscripts add “Father” after “God.”

In verse 10, the rich person is not specifically identified as a “brother.” So while the boasting or glorying about the humiliation would particularly fit a wealthy believer, the points then made about the perishing of the rich man like a beautiful blossom can apply to all those having abundant possessions.

Later manuscripts (in verse 12) add either “Lord” or “God” to identify the one who has promised.

For the concluding phrase of verse 17, the readings of manuscripts vary. A literal rendering of what is commonly regarded as the better manuscript reading would be, “with whom there is no variation or a shadow of turning.” This could mean that, with God, there is no variation or a shadow (or darkening) that is caused by turning or by a change. The text of fourth-century Codex Vaticanus could be interpreted to mean that, with God, there is “no variation that stems from the turning of a shadow.” Translators have variously rendered the phrase (“with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” [NRSV]; “with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change” [NAB]; “there is no variation, no play of passing shadows” [REB]).

The opening expression in verse 19 varies in manuscripts. Many later manuscripts read *hóste* (“therefore”), whereas fourth-century Codex Vaticanus and numerous other manuscripts say *íste* (“know”), which is both the second person plural indicative or imperative form of the verb *oida*. Depending on which Greek text they followed or whether they considered the verb for “know” to be either indicative or imperative, translators have varied in their renderings.

J. B. Phillips interpretively paraphrased the passage in keeping with the reading “therefore.” “In view of what he has made us then, dear brothers, let every man be quick to listen but slow to use his tongue, and slow to lose his temper.”

Translators who considered the verb for “know” to be an imperative have added an object (often the word “this”), as there is none in the Greek text. “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” (NIV) “You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.” (NRSV) “Remember this, my dear brothers: everyone should be quick to listen but slow to speak and slow to human anger.” (NJB)

In *The Revised English Bible*, the thought of “knowing” is linked to the previous verse, indicating that believers can be certain of what God has done in bringing them to birth by the word of truth to be a kind of firstfruits. “Of that you may be certain, my dear friends. But everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to be angry.”

Part of the directive in verse 19 is found in Sirach 5:11(13), “Be quick in hearing, and with patience express a reply.” Admonition to control one’s speaking and temper is also found in the book of Proverbs. “He who controls his lips has insight.” (Proverbs 10:19) “A quick-tempered man acts foolishly.” (Proverbs 14:17)

In verse 26, many later manuscripts add “among you” in relation to the one considering himself to be pious.



James reminds his readers of the importance of the bit in making the horse or donkey obey.

James 2: 1-26

2:1-9. Dead faith manifested in partiality

Verses 1-5. How the sin nullifies genuine faith.

Addressing believers as “my brothers,” fellow members of God’s family of beloved children, James admonished them not to show favouritism (literally,

“accept faces”), assessing the worth of others on the basis of their possessions and social status. His words may be understood either as a question or as an introductory statement to the exhortation that follows. As a question, the verse could be rendered literally, “My brothers, do you not, with partiality, hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory?” Another possible literal translation could be, “My brothers, do not, with partiality, hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory.” (2:1)

Translators have variously rendered verse 1, often supplying words that are not in the Greek text. “My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?” (NRSV) “My brothers, show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.” (NAB) “My dear brothers and sisters, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, never think some people are more important than others.” (NCV) “My friends, you believe in our Lord Jesus Christ who reigns in glory and you must always be impartial.” (REB)

The “faith of our Lord Jesus Christ” is the faith that has him as its object. It is faith or trust in him and all that he accomplished when surrendering his life. As the highly exalted one with divinely granted authority over everything in heaven and on earth, Jesus Christ is the Lord of “glory,” the glorious or magnificent Lord. Any display of partiality is inconsistent with faith in Jesus Christ. This is because all who put their faith in him come to be “sons” of God, enjoying the same standing in God’s family as all others who have been reconciled to him as his beloved children. (2:1)

Among those to whom James wrote, certain believers did not act in harmony with their faith in Christ. They showed partiality, treating wealthy or influential individuals with far greater respect than poor persons. Two visitors might enter their meeting place (literally, “synagogue,” which can apply either to a place of gathering or the meeting itself). One of the men may be splendidly attired and have gold rings on his fingers, indicative of his wealth and social standing. The other visitor may be extremely poor and dressed in rags (literally, “filthy” or “soiled clothing”). (2:2)

If the well-dressed man is given special attention and offered a choice seat while the poor man is told to keep standing or to sit on the floor (below someone’s footstool), believers would be guilty of discrimination and reveal themselves to be judges who make “evil decisions.” Their judgments would be based on outward appearances and, therefore, on the wrong standards. To make this important point about partiality, James presented it in the form of a rhetorical question. (2:3, 4)

He then stressed the impropriety of such preferential treatment, introducing his comments with the words, “Listen, my beloved brothers.” Although certain ones had acted wrongly, he did not reject them but addressed them as beloved fellow members of God’s family. By means of a rhetorical question, James reminded them that God had chosen the poor (the nobodies as far as the world was concerned) to be “rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those loving him.” (2:5)

The communities of believers to whom James directed his words were much like the one in Corinth. Based on human evaluation, not many among them were wise, influential, or of noble birth. (Compare 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.) Nevertheless, God had chosen the poor or insignificant ones to be rich in faith. They had responded to the message about Christ, and so God chose them to be his children, members of his family who are “rich in faith,” having the fullness of trust in him and his Son that is a priceless possession. This faith is their true wealth, for it makes possible an enduring relationship with him and his Son. As God’s children, they are “heirs of the kingdom,” which signifies finally entering as sinless persons into the realm where he is recognized as the Sovereign who exercises supreme authority by means of his unique Son Jesus Christ. This is the kingdom or royal realm that God has promised to all who love him, and this love is evident from their earnest desire to do his will. (2:5)

Verses 6-7. Why the sin is serious.

When according greater honour to the wealthy, believers dishonored the poor, the very ones who had proved to be more responsive to the good news about Jesus Christ. The rich, on the other hand, were undeserving of the kind of deference certain believers showed to them when they came to one of their gatherings. As a class, the wealthy mistreated believers and dragged them before courts. While the oppression from the rich may, in part, have been prompted by their hostile rejection of the message about Jesus Christ, it could also have been from their greed for material advantage. The rich commonly were intent on increasing their holdings. (2:6)

Wealthy unbelievers often were the ones who blasphemed the “good name.” Believers identified themselves as belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly, when unbelievers spoke abusively of them, they blasphemed him or the “good name” (the most excellent name by which believers were called). (2:7)

Verse 8. Partiality breaks the royal law.

The ones to whom James wrote would be doing well if they “fulfilled” or observed the “kingly” or “royal law according to the scripture, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” (Leviticus 19:18, LXX) The command calling for love to be shown to one’s neighbour or fellow is “according to” or set forth in the holy writings. It is a “kingly law,” for it is the command of God, the Supreme Sovereign. Moreover, it is “kingly” from the standpoint of being the command that sums up all the others that relate to the treatment of fellow humans. So it is a law that stands in the foremost position like a king in relation to all the other commands. In relation to the context, heeding the kingly law of love required that believers treat others impartially. (2:8)

Verse 9. The royal law convicts of guilt

If, however, believers were to show partiality (literally, “accept faces”), judging by outward appearances and acting accordingly, they would be “working” or practicing sin. The law of love would reprove them as transgressors. Their partial treatment of others would reveal lack of love for those whom they dishonoured, exposing the partial believers as having transgressed the command to love their neighbours as themselves. (2:9)

2:10-13. Dead faith results in judgment

Verses 10-11. The reason for judgment

James referred to the law with its numerous commands as being one law. Accordingly, individuals who observed all the requirements of the law but violated one command made themselves guilty of lawbreaking and so violated “all,” that is, the law as a whole. The keeping of numerous other commands did not cancel out the violation of any one command. (2:10)

The whole law has one source, God. He is the one who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” and also said, “You shall not murder.” (Exodus 20:13, 14 [13, 15, LXX]; Deuteronomy 5:17, 18, LXX) Therefore, the man who did not commit adultery but did murder constituted himself a transgressor of the law. His observing one command did not offset his violating the other one. It appears that James purposely singled out the two commands because he later discussed how believers could make themselves guilty of adultery through friendship with the world and commit murder through unloving actions. (2:11; 4:1, 2, 4; 5:4)

Verses 12-13. The reason for mercy

Believers needed to speak and act like persons who would be judged by the “law of freedom.” Based on the context, the “law of freedom” would be the “kingly law,” which obligates believers to treat others in a loving manner. The motivation for speaking and acting in harmony with the command to love one’s neighbour or fellow as oneself would not be the restraint stemming from a fear of punishment for transgressions. Instead, an inner motivation is involved, for (as set forth in Jeremiah 31:33 regarding the new covenant) the law is written on the hearts and so is an integral part of the individual’s inmost self. Accordingly, it is not a law characterized by the imposition of external restraints but a law of freedom, one that rightly motivated individuals choose to obey in response to the prompting of their inmost selves. At the same time, believers need to recognize that they are accountable to God and his Son for their words and actions. This means that they will be judged by the “law of freedom,” that is, the basis for judgment will be whether love guided their words and deeds. (2:12; compare Matthew 25:31-46.)

One’s showing mercy or compassion for others and actively responding to their needs is an expression of love. Therefore, the one who did not act in a compassionate manner toward those in need would not be shown any mercy when faced with judgment. “Mercy glories over judgment.” One’s having acted compassionately toward others means that one will be shown mercy at the time of judgment. In this way, the individual’s record of mercy determines whether the judgment will be favourable or condemnatory. In the case of merciful persons, their record of mercy and the corresponding mercy associated with their judgment, will glory or triumph over any unfavourable judgment that might otherwise be pronounced against them. (2:13)

2:14-20. Dead faith is useless

Verses 14-16. The principle stated and illustrated

“Of what benefit [is it], my brothers, if one should say, ‘[I] have faith,’ but he does not have works? That faith cannot save him, [can it]?” A faith or belief that is a mere expression of the lips has no substance. It gives no evidence of being a genuine trust in God and Christ. There must be actions that demonstrate the existence of a vibrant faith. Mere words cannot save or deliver anyone from sin and the condemnation to which it leads. When one truly puts faith in Christ and the value of his sacrificial death, conduct consistent with that faith follows. (2:14)

James illustrated that words are not enough; there must be action. A brother or a sister may be “naked,” lacking adequate clothing, and without essential food for the day. If someone were to do nothing to help the destitute person but say, “Go in peace; keep warm and well-nourished,” the needy one would not be benefited. To send a poor brother or sister away with such words and nothing for bodily needs would actually be hurtful and cruel, revealing a tremendous lack of love and compassion. (2:15, 16)

Verses 17-20. The inseparability of faith and works

Only if the poor brother or sister had been given needed food and clothing would it have been appropriate to wish him or her well. Likewise, faith must be accompanied by works that harmonize with it. Faith without works, or belief expressed merely with the lips, is “dead,” unproductive, or nonexistent. “According to itself,” or “by itself” and so without any tangible evidence of accompanying works, any claimed faith would lack substantive proof of existence as an activating force in the life of the individual. (2:17)

It appears that James introduced an objection to what he had written about faith and works. “But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’” This could be understood to be an assertion that, in their relationship to God and Christ, individuals vary, with certain ones having faith and others having deeds. (2:18)

To indicate that only the first statement in verse 18 constitutes the objection, numerous translations use quotation marks (NAB, NIV, NRSV), and others are more explicit in their renderings. “But someone may say: ‘One chooses faith, another action.’” (REB) “Suppose someone disagrees and says, ‘It is possible to have faith without doing kind deeds.’” (CEV)

If only the opening statement of verse 18 is regarded as the objection, the response of James follows. A number of translations make this explicit in their renderings, “To which I reply: ‘Show me this faith you speak of with no actions to prove it, while I by my actions will prove to you my faith.’” (REB) “I would answer, ‘Prove that you have faith without doing kind deeds, and I will prove that I have faith by doing them.’” (CEV) The implication is that, without “works” or “deeds,” a person would not be able to prove that he had faith. (2:18; for other possible ways this verse may be understood, see the Notes section at the end of this chapter.)

Seemingly, certain believers may have felt that faith or belief in one God was sufficient. While belief in the one God is acknowledged as good (“you are doing

well”), this in itself is not enough to be divinely approved. “Even the demons believe and shudder.” The demons or disobedient angels (Jude 6) do not deny that God exists, but their belief in God did not prevent them from pursuing a course contrary to his will for them. Their belief was not a faith that manifested itself through good deeds. Therefore, they shudder or tremble in fear on account of the severe judgment that will be expressed against them. (2:19)

James addressed as an “empty man” the person who would object to the necessity of deeds that were a product of genuine faith. Such an individual would be one who thoughtlessly failed to give the essential consideration to the matter of faith and so remained ignorant. James asked whether the “empty man” wished to know or desired proof or evidence that “faith without works is inactive” (*argós*), useless, or unproductive of any positive good. Instead of the Greek word *argós* many manuscripts read “dead” (*nekrós*), and one seventh-century manuscript (P74) says “empty” (*kenós*). While the words appearing in manuscripts differ, the basic thought is that a faith without corresponding deeds is worthless, dead, and lacking all vitality. (2:20)

2:21-26. Living faith proves a man righteous

Verses 21-24. The case of Abraham

When referring to Abraham as “our father” or ancestor, James may have had Jewish believers in mind. There is also the possibility that he considered Abraham as the “father” of all who possessed a faith like his, which would have included non-Jewish believers. Directing his rhetorical question to the “empty” objector, James asked, “Was not Abraham our father justified by [literally, ‘out of’ or ‘from’] works when he presented his son Isaac on the altar?” This question, as the next verse indicates, is not to be understood as meaning to preclude faith. What Abraham did in attempting to offer Isaac proved that he fully trusted God and the promise he had made to him regarding his son. God accounted Abraham as righteous, upright, or approved because he acted in harmony with his faith or trust. (2:21)

Based on what Abraham did, James continued, “You see that faith operated along with his works, and, by [literally, ‘out of’ or ‘from’] works, faith was perfected.” Abraham’s “works,” or his action in attempting to offer Isaac, did not take place apart from his faith. The “works” constituted a tangible expression of his faith, the works being active along with his trust in God and his word. Upon having demonstrated his willingness to obey God’s command to the point of attempting to offer his own son as a sacrifice, Abraham’s faith came

to be perfected or completed as a tested faith that had been revealed as truly genuine. (2:22)

On account of what Abraham did, the “scripture” about his being justified “was fulfilled.” The words of this “scripture” are found in Genesis 15:6, where they are linked to God’s covenant promise made to Abraham long before Isaac’s birth. The “scripture” says, “But [not in all manuscripts] Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” After Abraham had demonstrated his faith under test, the words about his being justified took on their fullest significance, for he then, on account of the “works” that expressed his faith, received the angelic confirmation of having God’s approval and the assurance of future blessing. (Genesis 22:10-18) Moreover, Abraham came to be called “friend of God,” a man whom God loved and approved. He was also a “friend of God” from the standpoint of his loving God, demonstrating that love by loyal obedience. (2:23; 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8)

The case of Abraham established that a man is justified or constituted right with God by (literally, “out of” or “from”) “works” and not by (literally, “out of” or “from”) “faith alone.” The mere profession of faith or belief in God is not enough; there must be deeds that undeniably establish that the individual truly has faith or trust in God and his word. (2:24)

Verses 25-26. The case of Rahab

Likewise, by works, the harlot Rahab was justified or divinely approved. Based on her knowledge of the miracle at the Red Sea after the Israelites left Egypt and of the later defeat of the Amorite kings Sihon and Og, she expressed her faith or belief that YHWH, the God whom the Israelites worshiped, had given them the land of Canaan. (Joshua 2:8-10) Her faith proved to be genuine, for she acted on it when accepting the Israelite “messengers” (“spies,” according to other manuscripts) into her home and afterward sending them away by another route so that they would escape detection and be able to return safely to the Israelite camp on the east side of the Jordan River. So, by reason of her good “works” for the two Israelite spies and which deeds had been prompted by faith, Rahab came to be approved, resulting in the preservation of her life and that of her relatives when Jericho was destroyed. (2:25; Joshua 2:14-19; 6:17)

As illustrated in the case of Abraham and of Rahab, a genuine faith is expressed in action. Deeds motivated by trust in God and his word are the tangible expressions of an existing faith. “Just as the body without spirit is dead, thus also faith without works is dead.” Without the “spirit” or the animating life principle, a physical body is dead. Likewise, when there are no deeds that prove

the existence of belief, the professed faith is merely an expression of the lips. It is dead, for such a faith is unproductive. (2:26)

Notes:

In verse 5, manuscript readings differ. The ones God has chosen are designated as the “poor to the world” (that is, poor in the estimation of the world of mankind), the “poor in the world,” or the “poor of the world.”

The quotations in verses 8 and 11 correspond to the wording in the extant Septuagint text.

In verse 18, the addition of quotation marks or of words to make the meaning explicit affects the way in which what James said is understood. Nevertheless, the basic message is that actions prove the existence of faith.

Many regard only the first statement of verse 18 to be the objection, but others have understood the objection to include the entire verse. “If we only ‘have faith’ [a] man could easily challenge us by saying: ‘You say that you have faith and I have merely good actions. Well, all you can do is to show me a faith without corresponding actions, but I can show you by my actions that I have faith as well.’” (J. B. Phillips)

The German *Gute Nachricht Bibel*, on the other hand, presents the objector’s words as only relating to faith. *Aber vielleicht wendet jemand ein: »Hast du überhaupt Glauben?« Darauf antworte ich: Ich habe die Taten! Zeig mir doch einmal deinen Glauben, wenn du mir nicht die entsprechenden Taten zeigen kannst! Aber ich will dir meinen Glauben aus meinen Taten beweisen.* (But perhaps someone may object: “Do you even have faith?” To that I answer: I have the deeds! Show me then your faith if you cannot show me the corresponding deeds! But I will show you my faith by my deeds.”)

Still another view is that James introduced the speaker to support the point that faith without works is dead. This introduced speaker would then be represented as addressing someone who objected to what James had said about faith and works. “You maintain that you have faith, but I have works. Show me the faith you claim to have without works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

In his letter to the Romans (4:3), Paul used Genesis 15:6 to prove that Abraham was not justified on the basis of works. His purpose for quoting from Genesis 15:6 was not the same as that of James in his letter (2:23). The apostle Paul established that works could not earn one an approved standing with God but that the individual is justified on the basis of faith. James, on the other hand,

presented matters from a different perspective. A living faith is revealed when it prompts good works. So the individual is justified on the basis of the works that are a product of faith. Both Paul and James are in agreement that the faith which leads to having an approved standing with God is not a mere expression of the lips but is an active faith that manifests itself in words and actions that are consistent with it. Like James, Paul emphasized the need for believers to live upright lives.

James 3:1-18

3:1-5. Living faith and the influence of the tongue

Verses 1-2. Our weighty responsibility for what we say

The admonition that not many should seek to become teachers appears to be directed to those who were not qualified. Addressing fellow believers as “my brothers,” James reminded them that teachers were subject to a severer judgment or greater scrutiny than others in the community of believers. As instructors of fellow believers, teachers had a larger sphere of influence, and any errors they might make could have serious consequences. They needed to be exemplary in their personal conduct, and those being taught would rightly expect them to adhere to the highest standards possible. (3:1)

James included himself when he acknowledged that all of us stumble often or make many mistakes. A man who does not stumble in word, making no mistakes, would be a “perfect man, able to bridle his whole body.” Even for qualified teachers, making mistakes is inevitable. The potential for serious error is far greater in the case of persons who are in no position to be teachers. This should have prompted those who wanted to be teachers to think seriously about whether they were prepared to face greater accountability than others, especially since the potential for making mistakes was very real and could cause harm to those who followed the erroneous instruction. Only a “perfect man” would succeed in being able to express himself correctly at all times and with the right disposition. Sound teaching involves more than one’s imparting and applying information accurately. What is being taught also needs to be conveyed with the right disposition and with a deep interest in all who would benefit from good teaching. Considering the difficulty of flawless control over one’s speaking, the man who would have perfect mastery over what he says and how he expresses it would be able to exercise like control over his whole body, using every part of his body in a faultless manner. (3:2)

3-5 verses. The power of the tongue illustrated

With bits in the mouths of horses, humans control the entire body of the animals, forcing them to move according to the will of the riders. Large sailing ships, driven along by strong winds, are controlled by the small rudder which the pilots steer. Both of these examples illustrate that a comparatively small device can control something that is far larger. Moreover, the two examples also serve to confirm that perfect control of the comparatively small tongue would mean that the one who had such mastery of it could bridle his entire body. (3:3, 4)

As the organ of speech, the tongue, though a small body part, is involved in voicing great “brags” or pretensions. Often the uttered claims fall far short of actual accomplishments, and the expressions of the tongue can also cause much harm. James illustrated that something that may appear insignificant in size can be responsible for great damage. It takes just a little fire, a spark, to set a whole forest ablaze. (3:5)

3:6-12. Living faith and the treachery of the tongue

Verses 6-8. Its unruly nature

The tongue, when used to utter slander, inflammatory remarks, or abusive speech, is a “fire,” unleashing a destructive force that can reach out to harm many. James added that, among the parts of the body, the tongue is a “world of unrighteousness.” Every conceivable evil or injustice can first be expressed or incited by the tongue. In a sense, therefore, the tongue is a whole world of wickedness in miniature form. (3:6)

When used to express hurtful, abusive, or slanderous words, the tongue becomes an instrument of defilement. The whole body is soiled, for the utterances come to identify the whole person as a slanderer, a liar, or a hateful individual. (3:6)

A misused tongue sets the “wheel of the birth” or “existence” ablaze. The expression “wheel of existence” could designate the course of life. Translators have rendered it as “the entire course of our lives” (NAB), “cycle of nature” (NRSV), “a person’s entire life” (CEV), “our entire environment” (*unsere ganze Umgebung* [German, *Hoffnung für alle*]), and “our life from birth to death” (*unser Leben von der Geburt bis zum Tod* [German, *Gute Nachricht Bibel*]). The misused tongue damages the individual speaker and can corrupt everyone who is directly affected by it, polluting the whole environment into which a person comes at birth. (3:6)

James referred to the destructive power the misused tongue can unleash as “being set ablaze by Gehenna.” The designation “Gehenna” is evidently to be linked to the Valley of Hinnom, where unfaithful Israelites anciently engaged in

idolatrous rites. Godly king Josiah eradicated idolatry and defiled the location, at which time or later the valley came to be used as a refuse dump. (2 Kings 23:10) It appears that this is the reason fire and worms or maggots are associated with Gehenna. With reference to the tongue, the meaning appears to be that the destructive power of the tongue is fuelled by the intensity of the blazing Gehenna. (3:6)

Humans have tamed and been able to tame all kinds of wild animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures. (3:7) Ancient accounts reveal just how successful people have been. Among the tamed animals were lions, panthers, bears, elephants, apes, and monkeys. Apes were taught to play musical instruments, and they were trained to drive chariots to which dogs were hitched. According to Suetonius (*Twelve Caesars*, Tiberius, 72), Caesar Tiberius had a serpent that he fed “from his own hand.” Pliny the Elder (in his *Natural History*, Book X, chapter 43) mentioned that nightingales were very popular among the Romans, frequently being sold for as much as the price of a slave. Often the birds would “sing at command.” In his fictional work, the first-century writer Petronius, says about the home of Trimalchio, “A golden cage hung in the doorway, and a spotted magpie in it greeted visitors.” Ravens were also popular for imitating human speech, as was the green Indian parrot. Mullets and eels were trained to feed from the hands of their owners.

While able to manage, train, or tame a great variety of creatures, sinful humans have not been able to restrain their tongue from speaking what should never be uttered. As the organ of speech, the tongue has proved to be injurious and filled with lethal poison. The lies, slander, bad advice, and error it expresses repeatedly are responsible for much harm and even death. (3:8)

Verses 9-12. Its unpredictable inconsistencies

With the tongue, humans can bless or praise the “Lord and Father,” the God to whom all owe their existence. Yet with the same organ, people can curse men who are made in God’s likeness. They direct abusive words against persons who are his creation and, being in his image, are endowed with attributes like his. These godly qualities include the capacity for thought, wisdom, love, a sense of right and wrong, compassion, fairness, sympathy, and an appreciation of beauty. (3:9)

“Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing.” That this would be the case is incongruous, contrary to the norm in the natural world. When directing his words to fellow believers, his “brothers,” James noted that this should not be so. (3:10)

Using rhetorical questions directed to fellow believers (his “brothers”), he then illustrated how this is contrary to what occurs in the natural world. Spring water flowing from the same opening does not change from fresh to brackish (literally, “pours forth the sweet and the bitter”), does it? Can a fig tree yield olives or a grapevine produce figs? Of itself, salt water does not produce fresh water suitable for drinking purposes. (3:11, 12)

3:13-18. Living faith and wisdom

Verses 13-16. Earthly Wisdom

The emphasis on the great harm that the tongue can cause served to warn individuals not to be hasty in considering themselves qualified to teach others. James then raised the question, “Who among you is wise and knowledgeable?” This relates to the wisdom and knowledge needed in order to teach others. Wisdom requires being able to impart knowledge in a manner that has a wholesome effect on those who are being taught. Therefore, James stressed the need for the right disposition. A man who is truly wise should be able to show by his good conduct that his deeds give evidence of the gentleness, meekness, or humility that comes from wisdom. For his teaching to be effective, a teacher must be able to engender a favourable response in those whom he instructs. This requires treating the ones being taught with respect, not making them feel that they are ignorant inferiors. An arrogant bearing and harshness are repelling, whereas kindness, gentleness, and an unassuming disposition on the part of a teacher invite a positive response in those who are being taught. (3:13)

If in the “heart,” the deep inner self, a man were to harbor bitter envy or jealousy and contentiousness, selfish ambition, or a quarrelsome spirit, he would have no basis for boasting about how suitable he was to function as an instructor of others. Instead, any of such bragging about himself would actually be “lying against the truth.” Bitter envy, or begrudging what others are or may possess and being resentful toward them, and a quarrelsome attitude run counter to what an exemplary teacher should be. Accordingly, any claim by envious and quarrelsome individuals about their suitability as teachers would be a lie. It would be “false to the truth,” the truth being that they are unfit as teachers because of their jealousy or envy and their contentiousness or selfish ambition. Their quarrelsome disposition would also be contrary to the words and example of Jesus Christ and, therefore, would grossly misrepresent the truth he taught. (3:14)

“Wisdom” that is linked to envy and contentiousness is no real wisdom. It does not “come down from above,” for it does not have a heavenly or a divine source. God is not the one responsible for this ignoble kind of “wisdom.” It is “earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” In being “earthly,” this professed “wisdom” is of a

debased nature as if derived from the dirt. It is the possession of earthlings who are not endowed with the genuine wisdom that comes from God. This ignoble “wisdom” is unspiritual (literally, “soulical”), being more like that of an animal that has no moral discrimination and is controlled by its senses to act instinctively. In being demonic, it is a wisdom associated with evil, corruption, hatred, and depravity. (3:15)

Jealousy or envy and contentiousness, strife, or selfish ambition destroy good relationships and give rise to ill-will and constant quarreling. Therefore, wherever these destructive traits exist, there will be a disorderly or tumultuous environment. Insecurity, suspicion, hatred, and divisiveness will prevail. Envy or jealousy and contentiousness or selfish ambition provide the breeding ground for every base or morally corrupt thing. (3:16)

Verses 17-18. Heavenly wisdom

Traits that are of an earthly, unspiritual, and demonic kind are the antithesis of the wisdom that comes from above, the wisdom that has God as its source. This wisdom is “first pure” or “chaste.” There is nothing of a defiling nature associated with it, and those who are guided by it conduct themselves uprightly and interact with fellow humans in a loving and caring manner. (3:17)

The wisdom from above is “peaceable.” Persons who possess this wisdom are not quarrelsome nor vengeful. In their dealings with fellow humans, they promote good relationships with and among them. They endeavor to resolve differences amicably and seek to understand others better. (3:17)

Persons who have the wisdom that comes from above are forbearing (*epieikés*), tolerant, gentle or courteous. Instead of insisting on the letter of the law, they look at matters humanely and understandingly. (3:17)

Heavenly wisdom is revealed in an individual’s readiness to comply with whatever is right and fair. The Greek word *eupeithés* is descriptive of a person who is compliant and cooperative, not stubborn or resistant but yielding when the situation calls for making changes. (3:17)

Individuals who are “full of mercy” would be ready and eager to aid persons who are in need. Compassionate people would be willing to forgive, not harboring grudges or becoming resentful. They would give others the benefit of the doubt, not putting the worst construction possible on what fellow humans may do or say. (3:17)

“Good fruits” would include all actions that are morally good, deeds that stem from pure motivation and even exceed what others might expect from an upright

person. Good fruits would be an evidence of love, a selfless and kindly disposition. (3:17)

Partiality is not the product of heavenly wisdom. Persons who manifest this wisdom do not show favouritism, not giving preferential treatment to those who are wealthy, prominent, or influential. In their interactions with others, they are considerate, kind, and loving, diligently striving to accord everyone the respect that is their rightful due. (3:17)

A hypocrite is a person who dissembles or puts on a pretence. In its basic sense, the Greek word for “hypocrite” (*hypokrités*) designates “one who answers” and came to be the term for an “actor,” a person who plays a part on the stage. Actors wore large masks equipped with devices that amplified the voice, and so the term *hypokrités* came to be used in a metaphoric sense to apply to a person who plays a part, a pretender, or a dissembler. Persons who are free from hypocrisy do not put on a false front. Their words and actions are a true reflection of their inmost selves. (3:17)

The “fruit of righteousness” may refer to all the good that results from righteousness, uprightness, or right living. Another possibility is that “righteousness” (that is, what God considers to be right, just, or upright) is itself the fruit. Either what righteousness yields or righteousness itself can only flourish where peace prevails or in an environment of mutual understanding and unity. One way to understand the concluding verse of chapter 3 is that persons who promote peace, working to further good relationships with and among others, are the ones who sow the seed that yields righteousness or right living as a fruit or that produces the deeds that are right and good. (3:18; see the Notes section.)

Notes:

In verse 9, numerous later manuscripts read “God” instead of “Lord.”

Verse 18 has been variously understood, and this is reflected in modern translations. “And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (NASB) “When peacemakers plant seeds of peace, they will harvest justice.” (CEV) “And the wise are peacemakers who go on quietly sowing for a harvest of righteousness — in other people and themselves.” (J. B. Phillips) “Peace is the seed-bed of righteousness, and the peacemakers will reap its harvest.” (REB) “And peace, for those who strive for peace, is the seed of which the harvest is righteousness.” (Weymouth) *Die Frucht der Gerechtigkeit aber wird in Frieden denen gesät, die Frieden stiften.* (The fruit of righteousness, however, will be sown in peace for those who promote peace. [German, revised *Elberfelder Bibel*]) *Die Früchte, die vor Gott bestehen können,*

wachsen dort, wo Friedensstifter eine Saat des Friedens säen. (The fruits that can remain before God grow there where peacemakers sow a seed of peace. [German, *Neue Genfer Übersetzung*]) *Die Saat der Gerechtigkeit, von Gott gesät, geht nur bei denen auf, die auf Frieden aus sind, und nur bei ihnen bringt sie Frucht.* (The seed of righteousness, sown by God, only springs up among those who aim for peace, and it bears fruit only among them. [German, *Gute Nachricht Bibel*]) *Wo Frieden herrscht, wird (von Gott) für die Menschen, die Frieden stiften, die Saat der Gerechtigkeit ausgestreut.* (Where peace prevails, the seed of righteousness will be scattered [by God] for the people who promote peace. [German, *Einheitsübersetzung*])

James 4:1-17

4:1-5. Living faith and worldliness

Verses 1-4. The manifestation of worldliness

James appears to have been informed about serious cases of disunity existing in the communities of believers to whom he directed his letter. He raised the question as to why conflicts and fighting existed among them. To identify the source, he raised another rhetorical question, “[Is it] not from here, from your lusts [*hedoné*] that battle in your members?” (4:1)

The Greek word *hedoné* basically means “pleasure.” In this context, the term may be understood to signify “selfish desire,” “passion,” or “lust.” Within the individuals, the improper desires carry on a conflict, exerting increasing pressure to be satisfied. These desires are like an occupying army that seeks to command and control the members of the body. When individuals yield to the desires, the welfare of others is ignored, with the focus being on self-interest or on what is presumed to bring personal pleasure. Whenever this happens in a community of believers, unity is destroyed. Distrust, suspicion, exploitation, and hurt feelings ruin what may at one time have been an environment where exemplary love prevailed. As a result, individuals begin to quarrel and fight with one another. (4:1)

Even though certain ones had wrong desires and yielded to them, they still did “not have” or did not obtain what they wanted, leaving them empty-handed. Seemingly, regarding the lengths to which they went in efforts to satisfy their cravings, James continued, “You murder and are jealous [*zelóo*].” Their murdering may be understood to apply to their manifesting a hateful disposition and a callous disregard for others, which would have been tantamount to murder. Another possibility is that the rich withheld the rightful wages from workers or deprived them of life’s necessities by means of judicial proceedings,

robbing them of their livelihood and so, in effect, murdering them. (4:2; compare 1 Corinthians 6:5-9 and see the Notes section.)

The Greek verb *zeloo* can also mean “to envy” or “to covet.” Certain ones were apparently filled with ill-will toward those who possessed what they themselves did not have but strongly desired. Their actions and their desires, however, did not result in obtaining what they wanted. (4:2)

The lusts and the base means to which individuals resorted to attain their selfish objectives led to fights and conflicts. Those who came to be embroiled in fighting and warring did not come to have or possess because they did not ask. They did not pray to God and, in view of their conduct, could not have done so in an acceptable manner. (4:2)

Those who did ask, or pray, did “not receive.” Their petitions did not receive God’s favourable hearing because of their asking wrongly. When praying, they had neither the right disposition nor the proper motive. All they really wanted was to satisfy their selfish desires (literally, “that you might spend [the things asked for] on your lusts”). (4:3)

Believers are parties in the new covenant and, on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice, have been reconciled to his Father. Their relationship to God, however, depends on continuing to live in a manner that accords with their having been forgiven of their sins and on being faithful to him. A failure to do so constitutes a violation of the covenant relationship with him and, therefore, is “adultery.” James addressed those who engaged in “fighting and warring” as “adulteresses” or, according to other manuscripts, as “adulterers and adulteresses.” By means of a rhetorical question, he reminded them (literally, “do you not know,” or do you not recognize) that friendship with the world means enmity with God. Therefore, anyone desiring to be the world’s friend would be choosing to have God as his enemy. (4:4)

Conflicts and quarrelling, envy or jealousy, and selfish desires are common in the world of mankind that is in a state of alienation from God. Individuals make themselves friends of the world when they think, plan, speak, and act like persons who are alienated from God and have no regard for his ways. Whenever individuals reject the course of selfless love and compassion, and then manifest selfishness, callousness, or hatred, or fight, quarrel, slander, and speak abusively, they incur God’s enmity or displeasure. They reveal themselves to be friends of the world, refusing to reject its hateful ways but, instead, choosing to be like it in its state of alienation from God. (4:4)

Verse 5. The cure for worldliness

No scripture corresponding to the quotation in verse 5 is found in the extant recognized “holy writings.” If the original reading of James 4:5 relates to the condition of sinful humans, possibly Genesis 8:21 may be regarded as expressing a similar thought (“the inclination of man’s heart is evil from his youth”).

The “scripture” is introduced with the words, “Or do you think that, for nothing [for no reason or purpose], the scripture says.” How this “scripture” is to be understood depends on which manuscript reading is followed. According to the oldest extant manuscripts, the verb for “dwell” or “reside” is *katókisen* (form of *katoikízo*). As the third-person singular indicative verb form in the aorist tense and the active voice, *katókisen* can be rendered “he made to dwell.” Literally, the passage could be translated, “Toward envy [*phthónos*] the spirit that he made to dwell in us is longing.” Many have concluded that the word *phthónos* here denotes “jealousy,” but this is by no means certain. Translators have either retained the meaning “envy” or have used “jealousy” or a related expression, and some (based on the third-person singular verb) have made an explicit application to God. “The spirit that he has made to dwell in us tends toward jealousy.” (NAB) “The spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely.” (NIV) “The spirit which God implanted in us is filled with envious longings.” (REB) “God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us.” (NRSV) Earlier, James pointed out that God does not try or tempt anyone (1:13), and so the passage could not mean that God is the active agent in implanting a spirit that “longs” or is inclined to envy. Possibly the thought is that the spirit (the activating or motivating principle) that God permitted to take up residence within sinful humans is inclined to envy. (4:5)

Many later manuscripts contain an intransitive form of the verb for “dwell” (*katókesen*, from *katoikéo*) not the causative form *katókisen* (from *katoikízo*) that is spelled with the iota [i], not the eta [e], after kappa [k] and so, in relation to “spirit,” could mean “the spirit which has taken up dwelling in us.” Based on this significance of the verb, the words of the “scripture” could be rendered, “Toward envy is the longing of the spirit which has taken up residence in us.” This could be understood to signify that the longing, yearning, or strong inclination of the spirit or motivating principle in humans is to envy what others may have or enjoy. Although divinely approved by reason of their faith in Christ and his sacrifice for them, believers are not sinless or liberated from the tendency to envy. (4:5)

4:6-10 Living faith and humility

Verse 6. The source of humility

If verse 5 relates to the sinful human tendency to envy, the next verse shows why believers can resist succumbing to the improper longing to which the human spirit in its fallen state gives rise. “But the favor God gives us is greater.” In expression of his gracious favour or unmerited kindness, God gives his spirit to believers and strengthens them to resist the inclination to sin. Accordingly, the power that God’s gracious favour exerts is far greater than the strong inclination or longing of the human spirit to envy. That believers will be granted divine favour, provided they maintain the right disposition, is confirmed by the quotation from Proverbs 3:34 (LXX), “God opposes the haughty, but gives favor to the humble.” To be a recipient of God’s favour calls for one to submit willingly to his pure ways, not arrogantly resisting or fighting against his permissive or express will. Humble persons acknowledge their need for God’s help, whereas the arrogant trust in themselves and fail to recognize their helpless condition. (4:6)

Verses 7-10. The way to humility

Because God grants his gracious favour to the humble, believers should seek to subject themselves to him. This requires being responsive to his ways, which are summed up in the commands to love him and fellow humans. It is also essential to submit to whatever trials he may permit one to face, never resorting to base means to gain relief but always relying on him to grant the needed strength to endure. The devil’s objective would be for one, when undergoing distress, to give up or to endeavour to escape by committing sinful acts. Therefore, believers must oppose the devil, relying on divine aid to resist becoming his victim. Believers who take a firm stand for what is right, continuing to look to their heavenly Father and his Son to aid them, can be assured that the devil “will flee from [them].” The adversary would not succeed and so would suffer defeat like that of an enemy who takes to flight. (4:7)

To be able to approach God acceptably, certain believers needed to make changes in their lives. James admonished them, “Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify [your] hearts, double-minded ones [literally, double-souled ones].” (Compare Psalm 24:3, 4.) Cleansing the hands would have meant repenting and abandoning divinely disapproved conduct. The “heart” denotes the inmost self, and to purify the heart would signify to cease being divided in affection and loyalty. Among the believers whom James addressed were “double-minded” or “double-souled” ones. Individually, they were like two persons, clinging to the world and, at the same time, professing to be devoted to God and Christ. Therefore, they needed to exert themselves to be exclusively

devoted to God and his Son, ceasing to be tainted by a love for the world and its God-dishonouring ways. (4:8)

Believers who had defiled themselves by failing to display love in attitude, word, or deed needed to give serious consideration to their standing before God. This should have made it possible for them to recognize their miserable state and to mourn and weep on account of their having strayed from his ways. Their laughter associated with self-indulgent conduct should have been replaced by mourning. They had reason to be sad about having failed to conduct themselves in a manner that honoured God and Christ. The joy they may have had as they pursued their own selfish desires needed to be recognized as having been improper. Their joy or the elated state should have been changed to dejection, a sense of bitter disappointment, shame, and regret. (4:9)

Believers who had sinned needed to humble themselves “before the Lord” (“God,” according to numerous later manuscripts). Their approach to him should have been like destitute beggars, acknowledging their sins and supplicating him for his forgiveness. Upon thus humbling themselves before him as helpless sinners in need of being shown compassion, they could rest assured that they would be granted forgiveness and thus exalted as persons who would be acceptable to him. (4:10)

4:11-12. Living faith and evil speaking

Verse 11a. The injunction

Verses 11b-12. The reason for the injunction,

As members of God’s family of children (“brothers”), believers should not be speaking ill of one another. A believer who speaks evil of his “brother,” demeaning him, blatantly exposing his faults, or raising doubts about his motives, or who “judges” him would make himself guilty of speaking against law and judging law. (4:11)

To “judge” a brother would mean to condemn him on the basis of personal standards, scruples, or biases. This kind of judging would stem from an overly critical and censorious disposition. (4:11)

Divine law requires that love be shown to one’s fellow, but the person who speaks against his “brother” and condemns him violates this law. Acting as if the law did not apply to him, he treats it contemptuously and so speaks against it. He judges law as not deserving to be obeyed. One who thus judges law is not a “doer of law,” for he does not live in harmony with it. In not doing what the law requires, he makes himself a “judge,” a person who has the right to decide his

own course or to make his own rules and regulations. When setting up his own standards for judgment, he judges divine law as inadequate. (4:11)

Persons who thus assume the role of judges of divine law are acting presumptuously. “One is lawgiver and judge, the one who is able to save and destroy.” God alone is the rightful lawgiver, for he knows what is best for his creation. He is also the one who flawlessly discerns the hidden motives, is not fooled by outward appearances, and can weigh all the factors when rendering his impartial decisions. Jesus Christ, as the divinely appointed judge, is in position to conform perfectly to his Father’s way of judging. Whereas the Father has committed judging to his Son, he continues to be the Supreme Judge. He is “able to save and destroy,” delivering individuals from condemnation and granting them his approval or destroying them, cutting them off as disapproved without the possibility of any future relationship with him. No human can save or destroy in this manner. Fittingly, James raised the rhetorical question, “You, however [dé, omitted in a number of manuscripts], who are you to judge [your] neighbour?” For believers to presume to be judges would mean to overstep their boundaries as persons who are obligated to love fellow humans, especially their own “brothers” in the faith. (4:12)

4:13-17. Living faith and secularism

Verse 13. The spirit of secularism

Some believers appear to have relied on their own abilities and resources, giving no consideration to their dependence on God when formulating their plans. “Today or tomorrow,” they would say, “we will go to this [particular] city,” remaining there for a year and doing business and making money. (4:13)

Verses 14-17. The folly of secularism

They ignored the fact that they did not know what their life would be the next day, let alone a year from then. Human life is transitory. As persons, therefore, people are like a vapour or puff of smoke that appears and then quickly disappears. (4:14)

Instead of arrogantly speaking and planning as if success were sure, believers needed to keep in mind that life has its uncertainties. At all times they should take into consideration God’s will. James gave the admonition, “You ought to say, ‘If the Lord wishes, we shall live and do this or that.’” Whatever God wishes includes both his express will and what he may permit. So when making plans, believers should recognize that they are subject to God’s will. Though not necessarily each time saying, “If the Lord wishes,” they should always plan with

an awareness of his will. If he permits that our life continue or he so wills it, then we will live and be able to do “this or that.” (4:15)

Among those to whom James wrote were believers who did not conduct their affairs of life in a manner that reflected an awareness of God’s will. They trusted in themselves and their abilities, resorting to boasting in their arrogance. Their haughty reliance on themselves and their own resources was “evil,” for it ignored God. (4:16)

“If, therefore,” James continued, “one knows the right thing to do and does not, it is sin to him.” In this context, the right thing is to live life according to God’s will. Any failure to do so would be a reflection of haughty self-reliance. This would be sin, for one’s uprightness is demonstrated by one’s recognition of and submission to God’s will. (4:17)

Notes:

Translators vary in the way they punctuate verse 2, which has a bearing on the meaning that is conveyed. “You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask.” (NRSV) “You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war. You do not possess because you do not ask.” (NAB) “You want things, but you do not have them. So you are ready to kill and are jealous of other people, but you still cannot get what you want. So you argue and fight. You do not get what you want, because you do not ask God.” (NCV) “You want what you cannot have, so you murder; you are envious, and cannot attain your ambition, so you quarrel and fight. You do not get what you want, because you do not pray for it.” (REB)

For verse 5, translations vary considerably in their interpretive renderings. Many consider the reference to be to God’s spirit. A footnote in the German *Neue Genfer Übersetzung* presents the following as a possible rendering, *Mit leidenschaftlichem Eifer sehnt sich der Geist, den Gott in uns hat Wohnung nehmen lassen, danach, dass wir Gott allein ergeben sind.* (With passionate zeal, the Spirit that God permitted to take up residence in us longs that we be exclusively devoted to God.) J. B. Phillips omitted words found in the Greek text, and his paraphrase is more of a rewrite than a translation. “Or do you imagine that this spirit of passionate jealousy is the Spirit he has caused to live in us?”

James 5:1-20

5:1-6 Living faith exercised by persecution

Verses 1-3. Oppressors doom predicted

When pronouncing woe upon the wealthy, James focused on those who exploited the poor. As these rich ones did not use their means to benefit others, they would face divine condemnation. Then they would weep and howl, raising their voices in bitter lamentation over the misery or calamity that would befall them. (5:1)

The wealthy had piled up riches, and so plentiful were their possessions that they had deteriorated from disuse. Their riches had rotted, corroded, or spoiled, and their garments had become moth-eaten. (5:2)

An example from the first century BCE of the kind of wealth certain men in the Greco-Roman world had accumulated can be seen from the comments of the Greek historian Plutarch. In his *Lives*, he wrote about Lucullus, the Roman general who had gained fabulous wealth from his successful military campaigns and, after his retirement from public and military life, indulged in luxurious living. In Naples, Lucullus had constructed “hills upon vast tunnels,” and had “brought in the sea for moats and fish ponds around his house,” and had “built pleasure houses in the waters.” After seeing this, Tubero the stoic called Lucullus “Xerxes in a gown.” The accommodations of Lucullus in Tusculum featured belvederes, “large open balconies for men’s apartments, and porticos to walk in.” When Pompey came to see him, he criticized him for making a residence that would be “pleasant in summer but uninhabitable in winter.” With a smile, Lucullus replied, “You think me, then, less provident than cranes and storks, not to change my home with the season.”

A praetor, in the process of preparing a lavish performance for the people, asked Lucullus whether he could “lend him some purple robes for the performers in a chorus.” Lucullus responded that he would see whether he had any purple robes and, if he did, “he would let him have them.” The next day he asked the praetor how many purple robes he wanted. “Being told that a hundred would suffice,” Lucullus offered him two hundred. Regarding this incident, the poet Horace reportedly observed, “A house is but a poor one where the unseen and unthought-of valuables do not exceed all those that meet the eye.”

James referred to the gold and silver of the wealthy as having “corroded” (*katióo*). The Greek verb *katióo* is understood to apply to rusting, tarnishing, or

corroding. In its pure state, gold does not corrode. From ancient times, however, gold has been alloyed with silver, which does corrode, discolouring the gold alloy. (5:3)

The corrosion of the stored-up wealth would prove to be a testimony against the possessors thereof, for the corrosion would prove that these riches had not been put to good use in relieving the distress of the needy. This corrosion or rust would consume their flesh. In their own person, they would experience the bitter consequences from the corrosion that gave evidence of their lack of compassion. No mercy would be extended to them when they faced divine judgment for the record of corrosion that testified against them and which would prove to be their ruin. The words “like fire” could relate to their flesh that would be consumed just like fire consumes combustible materials. (5:3)

Another possibility is that “like fire” is to be linked to the phrase that follows. “It is like a fire which you have stored up for the final days.” (NJB) This would mean that the corrosion is like a fire that they had stored up by their self-indulgent ways and their failure to use their riches aright. This stored-up fire would consume them at the time divine judgment would be executed against them. (5:3)

In the Greek text, the last phrase of verse 3 literally reads, “You have treasured up in [the] last days.” Numerous translations do not include the words “like fire” with this phrase and render the words to indicate that the “last days” had already begun. “You have piled up wealth in an age that is near its close.” (REB) “Yet you keep on storing up wealth in these last days.” (CEV) “You have hoarded wealth in the last days.” (NIV) “You have made a fine pile in these last days, haven’t you?” (J. B. Phillips) With the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth, a new age dawned and so the “last days” had their start. These “last days” would culminate upon his return in glory and the execution of divine judgment. From this standpoint, it could be said that the self-indulgent wealthy were piling up treasures in or during the “last days.” (5:3; compare Acts 2:16-21; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10.)

Other translations represent the storing up of treasures to be “for the last days,” meaning for the judgment then to be executed. “You saved your treasure for the last days.” (NCV) “This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgment.” (NLT)

Verses 4-6. Oppressors' crimes exposed

In their greed for more wealth, the rich had withheld the wages of the laborers who had harvested their fields. These held-back wages are represented as crying out, that is, crying out to be paid. Wages were due at the end of each workday, and the reapers depended on their pay to obtain daily necessities for themselves and their families. When the agricultural workers did not receive their compensation, they, in their distress, cried out to God. Their cries reached “the ears of the Lord Sabaoth.” “Sabaoth” is a transliteration of the Greek term that is itself a transliteration of the Hebrew word that means “hosts” or “armies,” and the expression “Lord Sabaoth” identifies God as the Lord who has hosts or armies of angels at his command and service. He heard the cries of the unpaid reapers, and so would act against those who had dealt fraudulently with them. (5:4)

Here, on earth, the wealthy lived luxuriously and indulged in pleasures without restraint. They “fattened [their] hearts in a day of slaughter.” The fattening of their hearts could apply to indulging their appetites to the full or to making themselves insensitive to the needs and suffering of fellow humans. (5:5; compare 1 Samuel 2:29; Psalm 119:70; Jeremiah 5:27, 28.)

A “day of slaughter” could designate a festive occasion when animals were slaughtered for sumptuous feasting. (Compare Isaiah 22:13.) Another possibility is that, on a day when innocent persons were slaughtered, wealthy oppressors continued to feast. “On earth you have had a life of comfort and luxury; in the time of slaughter you went on eating to your heart’s content.” (5:5, NJB)

Numerous translations render verse 5 to apply to a future day of slaughter, that is, to the time when divine judgment would be executed against the self-indulgent rich. This would mean that, for this future day of slaughter, the rich, like animals to be killed, had fattened their hearts or themselves. “While here on earth, you have thought only of filling your own stomachs and having a good time. But now you are like fat cattle on their way to be butchered.” (CEV) “You have lived on the land in wanton luxury, gorging yourselves — and that on the day appointed for your slaughter.” (REB)

The “righteous one” whom the rich had condemned and then murdered may designate any upright or innocent person. Numerous translations make the general sense explicit, rendering the singular “righteous one” as a plural. “You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.” (NIV) “You have judged guilty and then murdered innocent people, who were not against you.” (NCV) “It was you who condemned the upright and killed

them; they offered you no resistance.” (NJB) “You have condemned and murdered innocent people, who couldn’t even fight back.” (CEV) Through corrupt legal means, the wealthy either brought about the death of innocent victims to attain their base aims or deprived them of their means of livelihood, which would have been tantamount to murder. Because the wealthy had the power, the upright had no recourse. (5:6)

It may be that James also had in mind Jesus Christ, “the righteous one,” in whose judicial murder the rich and influential ones were involved. The Son of God did not resort to violent opposition, but allowed himself to be seized, mistreated, and killed. Moreover, he considers what is done to his disciples as being done to him. (Matthew 25:34-45) So when the rich either brought about the death of any disciples or deprived them of their livelihood, they murdered Jesus Christ, the righteous one. (5:6)

On account of what believers experienced at the hands of influential wealthy persons who persisted in unbelief, they needed to be patient, bearing up under distressing circumstances without bitter complaint or resorting to wrongful means to be relieved of their suffering. Deliverance was certain to come at the time of the Lord’s presence or upon his return as the highly exalted Lord of lords and King of kings. Believers would then be united with him, whereas those who defiantly rejected him would experience eternal ruin. So until the arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ, believers would have to endure patiently when subjected to trials and hardships. (5:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10)

5:7-11. Living faith exercised by patience under persecution

Verses 7-9. Ground for patience

Their patient endurance would assure them of a good outcome. With examples, James illustrated this for his “brothers,” fellow believers in the family of God’s beloved children. A farmer had to wait patiently until the crop matured and he could harvest “the precious fruit of the soil.” Sufficient rainfall is needed for there to be a good harvest. So the farmer had to be patient as he waited for the “early and late” rains. In the land of Israel where James resided, planting was done in the fall, and this was also the season for the early rains. The late rains came in the spring, providing essential water for the maturing crops. (5:7)

Like the farmer, believers needed to be patient. Strengthening their “hearts” could include building an inner resolve not to give up or not to yield to discouragement. Believers were not to allow their hope of future deliverance to grow weak but were to look forward to the glorious arrival of the Lord Jesus

Christ. James referred to the Lord's presence, arrival, or his again being with believers as having "drawn near." He did not know just when Jesus Christ would return but spoke of his arrival as imminent. At all times, believers were to regard Jesus Christ's coming again with the kind of certainty associated with an event that was close at hand. (5:8)

In the community of believers, as also in any family, problems and misunderstandings can develop. What others may say and do can at times create friction. James urged his "brothers," fellow believers, not to complain (literally, "groan") against one another. They should not make their own standards, views, or scruples the basis for finding fault with their brothers, for this could result in their coming under judgment. God is the Supreme Judge, and he has granted his Son the authority to judge. So the judge to whom James referred could be either the Father or the Son. The previous mention of the arrival of the Lord, however, would indicate that the application is to the Lord Jesus Christ in his capacity as judge. Believers were to keep in mind that the judge was "standing before the doors," fully aware of what was taking place among them and in a position to judge anyone who wrongly censured his "brother." This should have restrained them from grumbling about their brothers and making personal judgments concerning them. (5:9)

Verses 10-11. Encouraging examples of patience

When it came to distressing experiences, believers should consider the example of the ancient Hebrew prophets, "who spoke in the name of the Lord," or as representatives of YHWH. Among the people to whom they declared God's message, they patiently endured suffering, not giving up. Jeremiah, for example, was subjected to mistreatment and imprisonment. Although he at times complained bitterly about his lot, he continued to discharge his commission faithfully and so endured submissively without resorting to sinful acts to free himself from distress. (5:10; Jeremiah 11:18-21; 12:1-4; 15:10-18; 20:1, 2; 37:12-16; 38:1-6)

The record of those who faithfully endured moved James to say, "Look! We call fortunate the ones who have endured. You have heard [about] Job's endurance, and you have seen the Lord's end result [*télos*], that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful." All who endured faithfully could be referred to as "fortunate," or in an enviable or desirable state. They enjoyed God's approval and, therefore, their relationship with him proved to be secure. Believers knew about what had happened to Job. He lost his flocks and herds, all his children perished, he himself was afflicted with an exceedingly painful disease, and three of his close companions falsely accused him of secret sins because they had

wrongly concluded that God was punishing him. Like the prophet Jeremiah, Job also complained about his distressing experience, but he did not deny his God and so endured his trials as one who remained faithful to him. (5:11)

The Greek word *télos* literally means “end,” but it can also denote that which is the end result, the outcome, the conclusion, or the purpose. In the context of verse 11, translators have variously rendered the term. “You remember how patient Job was and how the Lord finally helped him.” (CEV) “You have heard how Job stood firm, and you have seen how the Lord treated him in the end.” (REB) “You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.” (NIV) “You have heard of the perseverance of Job and understood the Lord’s purpose.” (NJB)

In a number of ways, Job came to be the recipient of divine compassion and mercy. He received a revelation that made it clear to him that he could not possibly comprehend God’s activity. (Job 38:1-40:2) While severely afflicted and not understanding the reason for his suffering, Job had spoken rashly. Therefore, in expression of divine mercy, he was forgiven and acknowledged as approved. Once Job came to discern from the divine revelation the great limits of his understanding, he came to have a clearer vision of God, as if actually seeing him. In his dealings with Job thereafter, God greatly blessed him. Job ceased to be alienated from his relatives, acquaintances, and friends. He came to have twice as many sheep, goats, camels, yoke of bovines, and female donkeys than he had lost. Again Job fathered seven sons and three daughters, the daughters being extraordinarily beautiful. He lived a long and contented life, having the joy of seeing the offspring of his children, both grandchildren and great-grandchildren. (5:11; Job 42:1-16)

5:12. Living faith exercised by avoiding oath-making

Verse 12a. The warning

In their interaction with one another, some believers may not have been altogether truthful. (Compare Ephesians 4:25.) They may have resorted to oaths to make their words appear to be more trustworthy. Possibly for this reason, James, in keeping with Jesus’ teaching, said, “But above all, my brothers, do not swear, neither by heaven nor by earth nor with any other oath. But let your “Yes” [mean] “Yes,” and your “No” [mean] “No,” that you may not fall under judgment.” The introductory words, “but above all,” indicate that this was a matter of great importance, although not signifying the most important aspect in the life of believers. Instead of swearing to assure others they were speaking the truth or excusing non-fulfillment of a promise or agreement on the basis that a

particular formula used in swearing did not impose a binding obligation, believers should be completely trustworthy in their expressions. Their “Yes” should mean “Yes,” and their “No” should mean “No.” (5:12)

Whenever individuals frequently resorted to oaths in daily life, they exposed themselves as persons whose word could not be trusted. Their choosing to swear by heaven or by earth would have been regarded as having less binding force than swearing by God. So, when failing to live up to their word, even excusing their non-fulfilment of promises because of not having used a particular formula when swearing, believers would have come under condemnation. Others would have judged them as untrustworthy persons or liars, and they would also have become divinely disapproved. (5:12)

5:13-18. Living faith exercised in prayer

Verse 13. Exhortation to the suffering

Among believers, individuals would find themselves in a variety of circumstances. Some would be experiencing distress, whereas others would be enjoying a state of well-being. James advised the believer who was burdened by difficulties to pray, which would include asking God for aid and strength to be able to endure the affliction. When believers are in good spirits on account of favourable circumstances, they should “sing psalms” or praises, expressing their gratitude to God. (5:13)

Verses 14-15. Instructions for the physically ill.

Sick believers should call the elders of the congregation, having them pray over them and anoint them “with oil in the name of the Lord.” When ill, individuals are downcast and may begin to have doubts about their relationship to God. They may even find it hard to pray. Therefore, they would benefit from having elders from the community of fellow believers pray over them. The sincere prayer of the elders would be reassuring to the sick, reminding them of their being part of God’s family of beloved children and strengthening their faith in divine power to sustain them. With a renewed focus on divine help and the reassurance of divine love and care, the sick would come to have an inner peace that contributes to recovery. (5:14)

Anciently, olive oil was commonly used for medicinal purposes. (Isaiah 1:6; Mark 6:13; Luke 10:34) When the elders anointed the sick with oil, this would have had a soothing or calming effect on the afflicted, contributing to the healing process. The elders would have done the anointing “in the name of the

Lord” Jesus Christ, as they would have been acting as his representatives or for him as the congregation’s head who is deeply concerned about the welfare of each individual member. (5:14)

James referred to the “prayer of faith” as “saving” the afflicted one. This “saving” denotes being delivered from the illness and restored to health. In answer to the prayer of the elders who have offered their petitions as an expression of their faith in God and Christ, the holy spirit would operate freely within sick believers. This would result in their having a heightened awareness of divine love for them, producing an inner calm and a trust in divine power to sustain them in their distress. Thus God’s spirit would counteract any negative emotions that would otherwise interfere with recovery. (5:15)

Among sick believers, some may additionally have had a troubled conscience because of having sinned. Their spiritual distress could have greatly affected their physical well-being. The psalmist related how miserable he came to feel physically on account of his sin. “My body wasted away with day-long moaning. For day and night your [God’s] hand was heavy upon me; the sap in me dried up as in summer drought.” (Psalm 32:3, 4, REB) Fittingly, therefore, James included the thought that, if the individual had committed sins, it would be forgiven him. The person’s subsequent inward realization that his sins had been forgiven would free him from the emotional burden that otherwise could have seriously interfered with the recovery from sickness. (5:15)

Verse 16. Exhortation to persevering prayer.

As part of the family of God’s beloved children, believers should not be living secretive lives, presenting a false front about their conduct. Concealment of sin works against healing, for it creates a troubled conscience that is destructive to spiritual and physical well-being. James admonished fellow believers to acknowledge their “sins” (“transgressions,” according to other manuscripts) to one another and to pray for one another, so that they “may be healed.” (5:16)

The essential openness that promotes healing can only exist in an environment where love and trust prevail, for only then will believers feel free to acknowledge their errors, confident that they will not be faced with hateful rejection. In an environment where believers know that they are deeply loved and are not paralyzed by fear of negative consequences from confessing their sins, they are in a position to pray in specific ways for one another because of being aware of the personal struggles others are facing. The prayers of the upright have much power and are effective, for they are favourably heard by God. (5:16)

Verses 17-18. The example

James focused attention on Elijah to illustrate the power of prayer. Although a prophet with a special commission, he was still a human subject to feelings or emotions “like ours.” As a man, he was no different than any other upright person. Therefore, godly men and women can expect that their prayers will have power and will be effective. So that God’s disapproval of Baal worship might be undeniably revealed, Elijah prayed for it not to rain. In response to this prayer of an upright man, it did not rain for “three years and six months.” (5:17; 1 Kings 17:1; 18:1; see the Notes section.) After this period of drought, Elijah prayed for it to rain, and it did, providing the needed precipitation for the land to yield crops. (5:18; 1 Kings 18:42-45)

5:19-20. Living faith exercised by a diligent witness

Verse 19. The need for witnessing

Verse 20. The result of witnessing

Believers should be concerned about one another. When a “brother” or a believer strays from the “truth” (the truth as it relates to Jesus Christ, including his example and teaching), he needs help. If a fellow believer succeeds in turning him back from the wrong course, the sinning or erring “brother” would have “his soul” saved from death, and a multitude of sins would be covered. The “soul” designates the person, and being saved from death would mean being delivered from the condemnation to which sin leads. In many Greek manuscripts, the wording is ambiguous so that the particular “soul” could either be the erring brother or the one who aided him to recover from straying from the truth. The more likely significance is that the “soul” designates the sinner who would be forgiven and so would regain his proper relationship with God and Christ. Likewise, the many sins that would be forgiven or “covered” would be those of the erring brother, not those of the believer who came to his assistance. (5:19, 20)

Notes:

Instead of a form of *aphysteréo* (“withhold” or “hold back”) in verse 4, many other manuscripts contain a form of *aposteréo*. Although the original reading of fourth-century Codex Vaticanus is the same as fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus (a form of *aphysteréo*), a corrector has changed the word to a form of *aposteréo*, meaning “rob,” “withhold,” “steal,” “defraud,” or “despoil,” or “deprive.” The difference in manuscript readings, however, does not materially affect the understanding of the text.

In verse 14, a few late manuscripts identify the Lord as being Jesus Christ. Verse 15 is not to be understood that, in each case, believers would recover from illness, but (in answer to prayer) they would always be sustained and strengthened to endure their affliction. James would have known about believers who had died after a period of sickness, but he was also fully aware of the power of prayer. (Compare Acts 9:37.) He, like other believers, understood that all their petitions are governed by the request that God's will be done. This does not minimize the important role that prayer plays in the recovery from illness. Modern studies have established that the immune system responds to positive thoughts, emotions, and actions, and that persons who come to have a positive outlook because of faith and prayer are more likely to recover from serious illness than are persons without faith.

The account in 1 Kings 17:1 does not say that Elijah prayed for it not to rain, and so James (verse 17) seemingly based his words on another source. Nevertheless, it is reasonable that Elijah would have prayed before he made his declaration to Ahab that there would be neither dew nor rain. First Kings 18:1 mentions the "third year" of the drought, whereas James 5:17 speaks of "three years and six months" without rain. One way this may be understood is that the drought set in after the end of the usual dry season. With no rains coming at the normal close of the dry season, the period without rain proved to be "three years and six months," whereas the actual time of intense drought was shorter.



Divine Healing

1. Does the Lord heal today?
Of course He can and does heal today, but not always.
2. God is completely free to heal according to His will (ff. 1 John 5:13-15.)
3. His will may include physical infirmity and sickness in His plan for the testing, strengthening or chastening of His own (1 Cor.11:30-32; 2 Cor. 12:7-10). A Spirit-filled believer may be thus tested.
4. The principle of optimum benefit for the believer is the divine method.

Questionnaire

Chapter 1

1:1 What do you learn about the person who sent this letter? Whom did this person serve? To whom is he writing? What do you learn about the people to whom he is writing?

1:2-8. Make a dramatic story about this and act it, as a play.

1:2 To whom is James writing? What does James tell those people to do? What do you think about that? What will you do about that?

1:3 What would be different if you were to consider *trials to be ‘pure joy’? What will you do?

1:4 What do you need to keep on doing? What will the results be? What do you think about that?

1:5 What is it that God can give to people? Who is it that should ask? Why might it be just those people? What will you find out when you do ask God for this? What will God not tell you when you ask for this?

1:6 What must you do when you ask God for something? What do you learn to do when you need wisdom? What must you not do? When you doubt, what are you like? What do you think about that?

1:7, 8 What happens if you doubt? What would you think about that? How would you like to be?

1:9-18. Make up a dramatic story about this and act it, as a play. There could be three acts in your play: 1:9-11; 12-15; 16-18.

1:9 What should the poor person do? What will God do for that person?

1:10 What should the rich person be glad about? Why is that? What do you think about that?

1:11 What happens to flowers? In what way is a rich person like a wild flower? The rich person will ‘fall over and die like a wild flower’. What will the rich person be doing when that happens?

1:12 Whom does James say that God blesses? What reward will they receive? Use your own words to say or write a word picture of the reward. When will they receive that reward?

1:13-15 What do you learn about trials that tempt you? So, what tempts you? What is the order of events with temptation and *sin? Think of a *sin that you did. What led you to do that sin? What bad results might follow such a *sin?

1:16, 17 What is it that we must ‘not make a mistake’ about? What do you learn about differences between God and the sun, moon and stars? What do you think about that?

1:18 What is it that God chose to do for us? What do you think about that?

1:19-26. Make up a dramatic story about this and act it, as a play. There could be three acts in your play: 1:19-21; 22-25; 26-27.

1:19-21 What do you learn about how you should listen? When should we speak? When should we not speak?

What happens when you become angry? How do you change as you get angry? How might you change the way you behave when you are angry?

What particular bad things should you stop doing?

What should you accept from God, that he has already planted like a seed? What can the word of God do for you?

1:22 What mistake should you not make? How will you avoid that mistake? What will you do in a different way today?

1:23-25 What do you learn about what some people do? What does James say that those people are like? What about the other people? In what ways are they different? What will God do for those different people? What do you think about that? What will you do about that? What will God do?

1:26-27 What do you learn about being *religious? What connection do the things that you say have with being *religious? How does James describe the religion that our Father, God, accepts? What kind of religion is that? Who will

benefit if you have true religion? How would someone know that you have true religion?

Chapter 2

2:1-13. Make a dramatic story out of this and act it, as a play. Your play might be in two acts: 2:1-7; 8-13. There might be sections in each act.

2:1 What do you learn about the Christian family? What makes you a part of that family? What do you learn about what you think about other people?

Who is in your family? What makes you a part of that family? How should you value other people?

2:2-4 How does James say that you receive a rich man? How does James say that you receive a poor man? What is the problem with this? Why does James say that this is wrong?

2:5-7 As part of God's family, what do you find out about the way that your father looks at poor people? What will your father, God, do for them? What have you done to the poor man that you should not have done? What are the problems with rich people?

2:8 What does James say is 'the royal law'? Why do you think that he said that?

2:9 How does James say that you may break the royal law? How easy is that for you to do? How do you break the royal law in your family? How do you break it where you work?

2:10-11 What are the most important rules to obey? Is that what you think that James is saying? What do you learn about God's law? What do you learn about what God thinks about good sex? What do you learn about what God thinks about human life?

2:12 What do you learn about how God judges? How can that give you great hope? How will you be different?

2:13 What is God looking for in your behaviour towards other people? How will God reward you if you show mercy to other people? If someone shows *mercy, what will God do about the law?

2:14-26. Make a dramatic story out of this and act it, as a play. Your play might be in two acts: 2:14-20; 21-26. There might be two or three sections in each act.

2:14 Use your own words to say or write this. What do you think about that? What are you going to do about that?

2:15, 16 What do you learn about the need to help people with their practical needs? Is it enough to tell someone to 'be warmed and filled'?

2:17, 18 What do you learn about your faith? How do faith and actions belong together? What do your actions show about what you believe? If you do nothing, how can you show someone your belief?

2:19 What example does James give of belief shown by actions? James says that *demons show what they believe. What do you learn from that?

2:20 Why were people foolish? What evidence are those people giving about their *faith? What value is that?

2:21-23 You can read the full story of Abraham and how he offered Isaac, in Genesis chapter 22. Use your own words to say or write this. What do you think about this word picture?

2:24 How do *faith and actions belong together? What does God look for?

2:25 You can read the full story of Rahab in Joshua 2:1-21. Use your own words to say or write this. Why was God pleased with Rahab?

2:26 How does James say what he has taught so far? Use your own words to say or write this. What are you going to do about what James taught?

Chapter 3

3:1-18. Make a dramatic story out of this and act it, as a play. Your play might be in three acts: 3:1-5a; 5b-12; 13-18.

3:1 What do you learn about teachers? Why do you think God demands more from teachers than other people?

3:2 Who makes mistakes? What do you have to achieve to be perfect?

3:3 Use your own words to say or write this word picture. What other *word picture could you use for the same thing?

3:4 Use your own words to say or write this word picture. What other *word picture could you use for the same thing?

3:5a What do you learn about the tongue? What do you think about what you learned? What examples do you have from your own experience?

3:5b Use your own words to say or write this word picture.

3:6 How is the tongue dangerous? What experience do you have of the danger of your own tongue? How have other people hurt you, or to use James's word picture, 'burned' you, with their tongues? People's tongues can damage relations with other people. Which examples have you heard for yourself?

3:7 What can *human beings do? What do you think about that?

3:8 What is the difficulty with the tongue? What do you need to do because of this?

3:9, 10 What do you learn? Use your own words to say or write this. What do you think about this?

3:11, 12 Explain the meaning of these *word pictures. Draw a picture of these examples. Why do you think that James says this to his Christian ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’?

3:13 What does James say to the wise person? How would you know that someone was a wise person? What do you need to do in a different way?

3:14-16 What will you discover if you do not behave as a wise person? What would make you know that you behave in a jealous, bitter and selfish way? What are the results of jealous and selfish actions? How could someone come to deny the truth? What do you learn about wisdom that does not come from God? Write those things down.

3:17, 18 Many good things come from the wisdom that comes from heaven. What are they? What will you do in a different way when you use ‘the wisdom that comes from heaven’? What will God do for you that will help?

Chapter 4

4:1-17. Make a dramatic story out of this and act it, as a play. Your play might be in three acts: 4:1-10; 11-12; 13-17 The first act might have several sections.

4:1-3 What do you learn about fights and quarrels? Why do we want to fight? What would be a better way to get pleasure? Why do we not receive when we ask God?

4:4 Use your own words to say or write this word picture. What do you think about what James says here? What difference does this knowledge make to you?

4:5, 6 Use your own words to tell ‘what the Scripture says’. What do you learn about the help that God gives? How does God help us?

4:7, 8 What will you do? Why are those actions necessary? What will the results be? So, what are you going to do about what you have learned?

4:9 What could you do now? What could be your attitude to God? How will someone know that you are really sorry for your *sins?

4:10 What will God do for you if you are ‘humble in front of’ him?

4:11, 12 Use your own words to say or write this. Why is it bad to say bad things about other people? What do you think about that? Where does the law really come from?

4:13-14 Why should you not make a statement about what you will do? What do you learn to do when you make a plan for your future?

4:15-16 How ought we to speak when we plan for the future? Why is that?

4:17 What do you learn about *sin?

Chapter 5

5:1-20. Make a dramatic story out of this and act it, as a play. Your play might be in three acts 5:1-6; 7-12; 13-20

5:1-3 What will happen to us if we are rich? What will happen to stuff (clothing, gold, silver and other things) that we collect? Use your own words to say or write these *word pictures.

5:4-6 What does James say that we have done? Use your own words to say or write these *word pictures. Tell about those kinds of things that have happened in your own experience or in your own neighbourhood.

5:7-11 Use your own words to say or write this. Why do you need patience? What benefits come when you are patient? Where can you learn about the benefits of patience? How would you know if someone was patient? What will you do in a different way because you have studied about patience?

5:12 What do you learn here? What do you think about that? How will someone else know that you have learned this lesson?

5:13-18 How must you act when you are:

in trouble,

cheerful,

sick?

Who should do those actions? What do you think about that? Use your own words to say or write what James teaches about prayer.

5:19-20 What do you learn about a believer who acts on his own? What kind of responsibility do we have for other believers? What reward comes from God if you turn someone back to the truth?

Concise Word List

Albinus ~ a Roman ruler. He came after *Festus and after James, the Lord's brother, died.

Altar ~ the special table on which to offer gifts to God.

Ananus II ~ the chief priest of the Jews who was responsible for the death of James the Lord's brother.

Angel ~ a servant of God. He brings messages from God to people on earth.

Anoint ~ to put oil on someone's head. This shows that God has chosen the person for a special task.

Apostle ~ one whom God sends; especially one of the 12 that Jesus chose to be his helpers.

Baptism ~ to put a person under water or to put water on a person to show that they want to follow Jesus.

Barnabas ~ one of the early church leaders who worked with the *apostle Paul.

Believers ~ Christians.

Bit ~ a piece of metal put into the mouth of a horse so the rider can control the horse.

Bridle ~ attached to the ends of the bit to help the rider to control the horse.

Covenant ~ when people agree something together; when God and a person or people agree to a special thing.

Demons ~ bad or evil spirits that work for the devil.

Disciples ~ the 12 helpers that Jesus chose to be with him.

Elders ~ leaders in the church.

Eternal ~ what has always been and will always be.

Faith ~ belief that something is true; trust in someone or something; belief and trust in God and in Jesus Christ his Son.

Faithful ~ true and loyal to someone.

Festus ~ the Roman ruler in Jerusalem who died before James was killed.

Fig ~ kind of sweet fruit that grows on a tree. The tree is called a fig tree.

Gehenna ~ a valley near *Jerusalem where the Jews burned their rubbish.

Gentiles ~ people who are not Jews.

Glory ~ everything that makes God beautiful and great. It is like a bright light that is shining round God or Jesus.

Grape ~ fruit of a vine (a climbing plant). You can make it into wine.

Greek ~ the language that James used to write this letter.

Hebrew ~ the language of the Jews.

Herod ~ a king of the Jews who killed James the son of Zebedee.

Human being ~ a human person.

Humans ~ people.

Israel ~ the country of the *Jews; another name for Jacob, the first father of the Jews.

Israelites ~ the people of Israel.

Jericho ~ the city where Rahab lived.

Jerusalem ~ the capital city of Israel.

Jewish ~ people or things that are from the Jews.

Jews ~ people who were born from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their children.

Josephus ~ a Jewish man who wrote a history of the Jewish nation.

Joses ~ a son of Joseph and Mary and so a half-brother to Jesus.

Judas ~ a son of Joseph and Mary and so a half-brother to Jesus.

Judge ~ to judge is to do the work of a judge; to test and decide what is right or wrong.

Justice ~ fair and right decisions and actions.

Kingdom ~ the place or territory where a king rules. The Kingdom of Heaven is the people who are under God's rule.

Lord ~ a title for God, or Jesus, to show that he is over all people and things. The name that God gave to himself in the Old Testament. He was the One who had made a covenant with the Jews.

Meek ~ strong but humble.

Mercy ~ kindness and help to a person who does wrong, to show love to that person.

Messiah ~ God promised the Jews that a special person would come to save them. That person is the Messiah. Jesus is that Messiah but the Jews did not believe it. Messiah is a Hebrew word. It means an anointed person. In the Greek language, the word is Christ.

Moths ~ flying insects whose young eat clothes.

New Testament ~ the last part of the Bible, which the writers wrote after the life of Jesus. It is about the things that Jesus did and taught and about the church.

Oath ~ to make an oath is to use the name of a person, thing or God to witness that what someone says is true.

Old Testament ~ the first part of the Bible; the holy things that the writers wrote before Christ's birth.

Olive ~ tree or its small fruit with a stone. People make oil from olives. They use the oil to cook food.

Orphan ~ a child that has no parents alive.

Pastor ~ a church leader who cares for the believers.

Persecute ~ to hurt people because they believe in Christ.

Persecution ~ when enemies of God hurt people because they believe in Christ.

Preach ~ to speak out the message from God and to teach his word.

Prophet ~ person who speaks for God. He can sometimes say what will happen in the future.

Psalm ~ a song for when we are praising God; one of the books of the Old Testament.

Rahab ~ a woman of Jericho who trusted in God.

Religious ~ describes a person who believes in a god or gods. True religion is to trust in the one true God. We show it when we obey God.

Repent ~ to change your mind; to turn away from sin and turn to God.

Repentance ~ a change of mind and heart, to turn away from *sin and turn to God. To turn one's mind and life away from sin is to repent.

Riches ~ the wealth that rich people have.

Righteous ~ a righteous person is right in what he does; or a person whom God says is right.

Righteousness ~ the quality of being righteous.

Roman ~ Rome was the capital city of the rulers at that time. That which belonged to Rome was Roman.

Rome ~ the capital city of the rulers at that time. They were the Romans.

Rudder ~ a piece of wood or an oar fixed to the back of a ship. You can turn it to change the direction that the ship is going.

Salvation ~ the result after God saves us from sin and its punishment; the new life that God gives to those believe in the Lord Jesus.

Samaritan ~ a person from the country of Samaria.

Scripture ~ the books of the Bible.

Simon ~ a son of Joseph and Mary and so a half-brother to Jesus.

Sin ~ to sin is to do wrong, bad or evil; not to obey God; sins are the wrong things that we do.

Sinner ~ a person who does sins.

Soul ~ the part of a person that we cannot see; or the mind.

Stephen ~ the first person to be killed because he believed in Jesus Christ.

Synagogue ~ the place where the Jews met to worship God.

Temple ~ the special building in Jerusalem where the Jews went to worship God.

Temptation ~ something that tries to make us do wrong things.

Trials ~ troubles and difficulties that come to us.

Tribe ~ family from one man. The first Jews were the twelve sons of Jacob. The family of each son became one of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Vine ~ a plant that climbs. Its fruits are called *grapes.

Word picture ~ a description in words that helps someone to imagine a physical place or object.

Worship ~ show honour to God with praise, thanks and respect.

Zebedee ~ the father of the disciples James and John.

The Proto Gospel of James

(For information only)

Date: 140-170 CE

Attributed to James the Just

Theme Virginity of Mary and early life of Jesus

The *Gospel of James* also sometimes known as the *Infancy Gospel of James* or the *Protevangelium of James* probably written about AD 150. It is an apocryphal gospel, that was widely read but never accepted into the New Testament Canon. The *Gospel of James* may be the earliest surviving document attesting the veneration of Mary and claiming her continuing virginity.

Authorship and date

The document presents itself as written by James: "I, James, wrote this history in Jerusalem." Thus the purported author is James the Just, which the text claims to be a son of Joseph from a prior marriage, and thus a step-brother of Jesus.

Scholars have established that, based on the style of the language and the theological concerns, and the fact that the author is apparently not aware of contemporary Jewish customs, the work is pseudepigraphical (written by someone other than the person it claims to be written by). The echoes and parallels of the Old Testament appear to derive from its Greek translation, the Septuagint, as opposed to the Hebrew Masoretic Text, which is noticeable due to several peculiarities and variations present in the Septuagint.

The Gospel of James depends on hints in the Septuagint of the Old Testament), and embellishes on what is told of events surrounding Mary, prior to, and at the moment of, Jesus' birth, in the *Gospel of Matthew*, and in the *Gospel of Luke*.

As for its estimated date, the consensus is that it was actually composed some time in the 2nd century AD. The first mention of it is by Origen, who says the text, like that of a "Gospel of Peter", was of dubious, recent appearance, and shared with that book the claim that the 'brethren of the Lord' were sons of Joseph by a former wife. In the same train of thought, though, he admits that, while the notion might seem pious, it was not unlikely that the obvious interpretation of Scripture (that Mary bore them for Joseph) was true and acceptable.

Manuscript tradition

Some indication of the popularity of the *Infancy Gospel of James* may be drawn from the fact that about one hundred and thirty Greek manuscripts containing it have survived. The *Gospel of James* was translated into Syriac, Ethiopic, Coptic, Georgian, Old Slavonic, Armenian, Arabic, Irish and Latin. Though no early Latin versions are known, it was relegated to the apocrypha in the Gelasian decretal, so must have been known in the West. As with the canonical gospels, the vast majority of the manuscripts come from the tenth century or later. The earliest known manuscript of the text, a papyrus dating to the 3rd or early 4th century, was found in 1958; it is kept in the Bodmer Library, Geneva (Papyrus Bodmer 5). Of the surviving Greek manuscripts, the fullest surviving text is a 10th century codex in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (Paris 1454).

Genre

The *Gospel of James* is one of several surviving Infancy Gospels that give an idea of the miracle literature that was created to satisfy the hunger of early Christians for more detail about the early life of their Savior. Such literature is filled with ignorance of Jewish life, unlike the many consistent details in the Bible, which is obviously a library of Jewish books. Interestingly enough, not one work of the genre under discussion is in any Bible. In Greek such an infancy gospel was termed a *protevangelion*, a "pre-Gospel" narrating events of Jesus' life before those recorded in the four canonical gospels. Such a work was intended to be "apologetic, doctrinal, or simply to satisfy one's curiosity". The literary genre that these works represent shows stylistic features that suggest dates in the second century and later. Other "infancy gospels" in this tradition include *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* (based on the Protevangelium of James, and on the Infancy Gospel of Thomas), and the so-called *Arabic Infancy Gospel*; all of which were regarded by the church as apocryphal.

Content of the Manuscript

The *Gospel of James* is in three equal parts, of eight chapters each -

the first contains the story of Mary's own unique birth and childhood, and assignment to the temple

the second concerns the crisis posed by Mary's becoming a woman and thus her imminent pollution of the temple, her assignment to Joseph as guardian, and the tests of her virginity,

the third relates the Nativity, with the visit of midwives, hiding of Jesus from Herod the Great in a feeding trough, and even the parallel hiding in the hills of John the Baptist and his mother (Elizabeth) from Herod Antipas.

One of the work's high points is the Lament of Anna. A primary theme is the work and grace of God in Mary's life, Mary's personal purity, and her perpetual virginity before, during, and after the birth of Jesus, as confirmed by the midwife after she gave birth, and tested by "Salome" who is perhaps intended to be Salome, later the disciple of Jesus who is mentioned in the Gospel of Mark as being at the Crucifixion.

Besides the perpetual virginity of Mary, this is also the earliest text that explicitly claims that Joseph was a widower, with children, at the time that Mary is entrusted to his care. This is the feature which appears in its earliest mention, which is in a text of Origen, who adduces it to demonstrate that the 'brethren of the Lord' were sons of Joseph by a former wife. Since the text was regarded as heresy by the time of the Gelasian Decree, its dismissal may be due in part to this reading of the *adelpoi*, which corresponded to the developed Eastern Orthodox view rather than the western, i.e. Roman Catholic, view, which treated them as cousins.

Among further traditions not present in the four canonical gospels are the birth of Jesus in a cave, and the martyrdom of John the Baptist's father Zechariah during the slaughter of the infants. The Nativity reported as taking place in a cave, with its Mithraic overtones, remained in the popular imagination; many Early Renaissance Sienese and Florentine paintings of the Nativity, as well as Byzantine, Greek and Russian icons of the Nativity, show such a chthonic setting.

Infancy Gospel of James

The Proto-evangelium of James The Birth of Mary the Holy Mother of God, and Very Glorious Mother of Jesus Christ

IN THE RECORDS OF THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL was Joachim, a man rich exceedingly; and he brought his offerings double, saying: There shall be of my superabundance to all the people, and there shall be the offering for my forgiveness to the Lord for a propitiation for me. For the great day of the Lord was at hand, and the sons of Israel were bringing their offerings. And there stood over against him Rubim, saying: It is not meet for thee first to bring thine offerings, because thou hast not made seed in Israel. And Joachim was exceedingly grieved, and went away to the registers of the twelve tribes of the people, saying: I shall see the registers of the twelve tribes of Israel, as to

whether I alone have not made seed in Israel. And he searched, and found that all the righteous had raised up seed in Israel. And he called to mind the patriarch Abraham, that in the last day God gave him a son Isaac. And Joachim was exceedingly grieved, and did not come into the presence of his wife; but he retired to the desert, and there pitched his tent, and fasted forty days and forty nights, saying in himself: I will not go down either for food or for drink until the Lord my God shall look upon me, and prayer shall be my food and drink.

2. And his wife Anna mourned in two mournings, and lamented in two lamentations, saying: I shall bewail my widowhood; I shall bewail my childlessness. And the great day of the Lord was at hand; and Judith her maid-servant said: How long dost thou humiliate thy soul? Behold, the great day of the Lord is at hand, and it is unlawful for thee to mourn. But take this head-band, which the woman that made it gave to me; for it is not proper that I should wear it, because I am a maid-servant, and it has a royal appearance. And Anna said: Depart from me; for I have not done such things, and the Lord has brought me very low. I fear that some wicked person has given it to thee, and thou hast come to make me a sharer in thy sin. And Judith said: Why should I curse thee, seeing that the Lord hath shut thy womb, so as not to give thee fruit in Israel? And Anna was grieved exceedingly, and put off her garments of mourning, and cleaned her head, and put on her wedding garments, and about the ninth hour went down to the garden to walk. And she saw a laurel, and sat under it, and prayed to the Lord, saying: O God of our fathers, bless me and hear my prayer, as Thou didst bless the womb of Sarah, and didst give her a son Isaac.

3. And gazing towards the heaven, she saw a sparrow's nest in the laurel, and made a lamentation in herself, saying: Alas! who begot me? and what womb produced me? because I have become a curse in the presence of the sons of Israel, and I have been reproached, and they have driven me in derision out of the temple of the Lord. Alas! to what have I been likened? I am not like the fowls of the heaven, because even the fowls of the heaven are productive before Thee, O Lord. Alas! to what have I been likened? I am not like the beasts of the earth, because even the beasts of the earth are productive before Thee, O Lord. Alas! to what have I been likened? I am not like these waters, because even these waters are productive before Thee, O Lord. Alas! to what have I been likened? I am not like this earth, because even the earth bringeth forth its fruits in season, and blesseth Thee, O Lord.

4. And, behold, an angel of the Lord stood by, saying: Anna, Anna, the Lord hath heard thy prayer, and thou shalt conceive, and shall bring forth; and thy seed shall be spoken of in all the world. And Anna said: As the Lord my God liveth, if I beget either male or female, I will bring it as a gift to the Lord my

God; and it shall minister to Him in holy things all the days of its life. And, behold, two angels came, saying to her: Behold, Joachim thy husband is coming with his flocks. For an angel of the Lord went down to him, saying: Joachim, Joachim, the Lord God hath heard thy prayer Go down hence; for, behold, thy wife Anna shall conceive. And Joachim went down and called his shepherds, saying: Bring me hither ten she-lambs without spot or blemish, and they shall be for the priests and the elders; and a hundred goats for all the people. And, behold, Joachim came with his flocks; and Anna stood by the gate, and saw Joachim coming, and she ran anti hung upon his neck, saying: Now I know that the Lord God hath blessed me exceedingly; for, behold the widow no longer a widow, and I the childless shall conceive. And Joachim rested the first day in his house.

5. And on the following day he brought his offerings, saying in himself: If the Lord God has been rendered gracious to me, the plate on the priest's forehead will make it manifest to me. And Joachim brought his offerings, and observed attentively the priest's plate when he went up to the altar of the Lord, and he saw no sin in himself. And Joachim said: Now I know that the Lord has been gracious unto me, and has remitted all my sins. And he went down from the temple of the Lord justified, and departed to his own house. And her months were fulfilled, and in the ninth month Anna brought forth. And she said to the midwife: What have I brought forth? and she said: A girl. And said Anna: My soul has been magnified this day. And she laid her down. And the days having been fulfilled, Anna was purified, and gave the breast to the child, and called her name Mary.

6. And the child grew strong day by day; and when she was six months old, her mother set her on the ground to try whether she could stand, and she walked seven steps and came into her bosom; and she snatched her up, saying: As the Lord my God liveth, thou shall not walk on this earth until I bring thee into the temple of the Lord. And she made a sanctuary in her bed-chamber, and allowed nothing common or unclean to pass through her. And she called the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews, and they led her astray. And when she was a year old, Joachim made a great feast, and invited the priests, and the scribes, and the elders, and all the people of Israel. And Joachim brought the child to the priests; and they blessed her, saying: O God of our fathers, bless this child, and give her an everlasting name to be named in all generations. And all the people said: So be it, so be it, amen. And he brought her to the chief priests; and they blessed her, saying: O God most high, look upon this child, and bless her with the utmost blessing, which shall be for ever. And her mother snatched her up, and took her into the sanctuary of her bed-chamber, and gave her the breast. And Anna made a song to the Lord God, saying: I will sing a song to the Lord my

God, for He hath looked upon me, and hath taken away the reproach of mine enemies; and the Lord hath given the fruit of His righteousness, singular in its kind, and richly endowed before Him. Who will tell the sons of Rubim that Anna gives suck? Hear, hear, ye twelve tribes of Israel, that Anna gives suck. And she laid her to rest in the bed-chamber of her sanctuary, and went out and ministered unto them. And when the supper was ended, they went down rejoicing, and glorifying the God of Israel.

7. And her months were added to the child. And the child was two years old, and Joachim said: Let us take her up to the temple of the Lord, that we may pay the vow that we have vowed, lest perchance the Lord send to us, and our offering be not received. And Anna said: Let us wait for the third year, in order that the child may not seek for father or mother. And Joachim said: So let us wait. And the child was three years old, and Joachim said: Invite the daughters of the Hebrews that are undefiled, and let them take each a lamp, and let them stand with the lamps burning, that the child may not turn back, and her heart be captivated from the temple of the Lord. And they did so until they went up into the temple of the Lord. And the priest received her, and kissed her, and blessed her, saying: The Lord has magnified thy name in all generations. In thee, on the last of the days, the Lord will manifest His redemption to the sons of Israel. And he set her down upon the third step of the altar, and the Lord God sent grace upon her; and she danced with her feet, and all the house of Israel loved her.

8. And her parents went down marvelling, and praising the Lord God, because the child had not turned back. And Mary was in the temple of the Lord as if she were a dove that dwelt there, and she received food from the hand of an angel. And when she was twelve years old there was held a council of the priests, saying: Behold, Mary has reached the age of twelve years in the temple of the Lord. What then shall we do with her, test perchance she defile the sanctuary of the Lord? And they said to the high priest: Thou standest by the altar of the Lord; go in, and pray concerning her; and whatever the Lord shall manifest unto thee, that also will we do. And the high priest went in, taking the robe with the twelve bells into the holy of holies; and he prayed concerning her. And behold an angel of the Lord stood by him, saying unto him: Zacharias, Zacharias, go out and assemble the widowers of the people, and let them bring each his rod; and to whomsoever the Lord shall show a sign, his wife shall she be. And the heralds went out through all the circuit of Judaea, and the trumpet of the Lord sounded, and all ran.

9. And Joseph, throwing away his axe, went out to meet them; and when they had assembled, they went away to the high priest, taking with them their rods. And he, taking the rods of all of them, entered into the temple, and prayed; and

having ended his prayer, he took the rods and came out, and gave them to them: but there was no sign in them, and Joseph took his rod last; and, behold, a dove came out of the rod, and flew upon Joseph's head. And the priest said to Joseph, Thou hast been chosen by lot to take into thy keeping the virgin of the Lord. But Joseph refused, saying: I have children, and I am an old man, and she is a young girl. I am afraid lest I become a laughing-stock to the sons of Israel. And the priest said to Joseph: Fear the Lord thy God, and remember what the Lord did to Dathan, and Abiram, and Korah; how the earth opened, and they were swallowed up on account of their contradiction. And now fear, O Joseph, lest the same things happen in thy house. And Joseph was afraid, and took her into his keeping. And Joseph said to Mary: Behold, I have received thee from the temple of the Lord; and now I leave thee in my house, and go away to build my buildings, and I shall come to thee. The Lord will protect thee.

10. And there was a council of the priests, saying: Let us make a veil for the temple of the Lord. And the priest said: Call to me the undefiled virgins of the family of David. And the officers went away, and sought, and found seven virgins. And the priest remembered the child Mary, that she was of the family of David, and undefiled before God. And the officers went away and brought her. And they brought them into the temple of the Lord. And the priest said: Choose for me by lot who shall spin the gold, and the white, and the fine linen, and the silk, and the blue, and the scarlet, and the true purple. And the true purple and the scarlet fell to the lot of Mary, and she took them, and went away to her house. And at that time Zacharias was dumb, and Samuel was in his place until the time that Zacharias spake. And Mary took the scarlet, and span it.

11. And she took the pitcher, and went out to fill it with water. And, behold, a voice saying: Hail, thou who hast received grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women! And she looked round, on the right hand and on the left, to see whence this voice came. And she went away, trembling, to her house, and put down the pitcher; and taking the purple, she sat down on her seat, and drew it out. And, behold, an angel of the Lord stood before her, saying: Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found grace before the Lord of all, and thou shalt conceive, according to His word. And she hearing, reasoned with herself, saying: Shall I conceive by the Lord, the living God? and shall I bring forth as every woman brings forth? And the angel of the Lord said: Not so, Mary; for the power of the Lord shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of the Most High. And thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins. And Mary said: Behold, the servant of the Lord before His face: let it be unto me according to thy word.

12. And she made the purple and the scarlet, and took them to the priest. And the priest blessed her, and said: Mary, the Lord God hath magnified thy name, and thou shall be blessed in all the generations of the earth. And Mary, with great joy, went away to Elizabeth her kinswoman, and knocked at the door. And when Elizabeth heard her, she threw away the scarlet, and ran to the door, and opened it; and seeing Mary, she blessed her, and said: Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? for, behold, that which is in me leaped and blessed thee. But Mary had forgotten the mysteries of which the archangel Gabriel had spoken, and gazed up into heaven, and said: Who am I, O Lord, that all the generations of the earth should bless me? And she remained three months with Elizabeth; and day by day she grew bigger. And Mary being afraid, went away to her own house, and hid herself from the sons of Israel. And she was sixteen years old when these mysteries happened.

13. And she was in her sixth month; and, behold, Joseph came back from his building, and, entering into his house, he discovered that she was big with child. And he smote his face, and threw himself on the ground upon the sackcloth, and wept bitterly, saying: With what face shall I look upon the Lord my God? and what prayer shall I make about this maiden? because I received her a virgin out of the temple of the Lord, and I have not watched over her. Who is it that has hunted me down? Who has done this evil thing in my house, and defiled the virgin? Has not the history of Adam been repeated in me? For just as Adam was in the hour of his singing praise, and the serpent came, and found Eve alone, and completely deceived her, so it has happened to me also. And Joseph stood up from the sackcloth, and called Mary, and said to her: O thou who hast been cared for by God, why hast thou done this and forgotten the Lord thy God? Why hast thou brought low thy soul, thou that wast brought up in the holy of holies, and that didst receive food from the hand of an angel? And she wept bitterly, saying: I am innocent, and have known no man. And Joseph said to her: Whence then is that which is in thy womb? And she said: As the Lord my God liveth, I do not know whence it is to me.

14. And Joseph was greatly afraid, and retired from her, and considered what he should do in regard to her. And Joseph said: If I conceal her sin, I find myself fighting against the law of the Lord; and if I expose her to the sons of Israel, I am afraid lest that which is in her be from an angel, and I shall be found giving up innocent blood to the doom of death. What then shall I do with her? I will put her away from me secretly. And night came upon him; and, behold, an angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream, saying: Be not afraid for this maiden, for that which is in her is of the Holy Spirit; and she will bring forth a Son, and thou shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. And

Joseph arose from sleep, and glorified the God of Israel, who had given him this grace; and he kept her.

15. And Annas the scribe came to him, and said: Why hast thou not appeared in our assembly? And Joseph said to him: Because I was weary from my journey, and rested the first day. And he turned, and saw that Mary was with child. And he ran away to the priest? and said to him: Joseph, whom thou didst vouch for, has committed a grievous crime. And the priest said: How so? And he said: He has defiled the virgin whom he received out of the temple of the Lord, and has married her by stealth, and has not revealed it to the sons of Israel. And the priest answering, said: Has Joseph done this? Then said Annas the scribe: Send officers, and thou wilt find the virgin with child. And the officers went away, and found it as he had said; and they brought her along with Joseph to the tribunal. And the priest said: Mary, why hast thou done this? and why hast thou brought thy soul low, and forgotten the Lord thy God? Thou that wast reared in the holy of holies, and that didst receive food from the hand of an angel, and didst hear the hymns, and didst dance before Him, why hast thou done this? And she wept bitterly, saying: As the Lord my God liveth, I am pure before Him, and know not a man. And the priest said to Joseph: Why hast thou done this? And Joseph said: As the Lord liveth, I am pure concerning her. Then said the priest: Bear not false witness, but speak the truth. Thou hast married her by stealth, and hast not revealed it to the sons of Israel, and hast not bowed thy head under the strong hand, that thy seed might be blessed. And Joseph was silent.

16. And the priest said: Give up the virgin whom thou didst receive out of the temple of the Lord. And Joseph burst into tears. And the priest said: I will give you to drink of the water of the ordeal of the Lord, and He shall make manifest your sins in your eyes. And the priest took the water, and gave Joseph to drink and sent him away to the hill-country; and he returned unhurt. And he gave to Mary also to drink, and sent her away to the hill-country; and she returned unhurt. And all the people wondered that sin did not appear in them. And the priest said: If the Lord God has not made manifest your sins, neither do I judge you. And he sent them away. And Joseph took Mary, and went away to his own house, rejoicing and glorifying the God of Israel.

17. And there was an order from the Emperor Augustus, that all in Bethlehem of Judaea should be enrolled. And Joseph said: I shall enrol my sons, but what shall I do with this maiden? How shall I enrol her? As my wife? I am ashamed. As my daughter then? But all the sons of Israel know that she is not my daughter. The day of the Lord shall itself bring it to pass as the Lord will. And he saddled the ass, and set her upon it; and his son led it, and Joseph followed. And when they had come within three miles, Joseph turned and saw her sorrowful; and he

said to himself: Likely that which is in her distresses her. And again Joseph turned and saw her laughing. And he said to her: Mary, how is it that I see in thy face at one time laughter, at another sorrow? And Mary said to Joseph: Because I see two peoples with my eyes; the one weeping and lamenting, and the other rejoicing and exulting. And they came into the middle of the road, and Mary said to him: Take me down from off the ass, for that which is in me presses to come forth. And he took her down from off the ass, and said to her: Whither shall I lead thee, and cover thy disgrace? for the place is desert.

18. And he found a cave there, and led her into it; and leaving his two sons beside her, he went out to seek a widwife in the district of Bethlehem. And I Joseph was walking, and was not walking; and I looked up into the sky, and saw the sky astonished; and I looked up to the pole of the heavens, and saw it standing, and the birds of the air keeping still. And I looked down upon the earth, and saw a trough lying, and work-people reclining: and their hands were in the trough. And those that were eating did not eat, and those that were rising did not carry it up, and those that were conveying anything to their mouths did not convey it; but the faces of all were looking upwards. And I saw the sheep walking, and the sheep stood still; and the shepherd raised his hand to strike them, and his hand remained up. And I looked upon the current of the river, and I saw the mouths of the kids resting on the water and not drinking, and all things in a moment were driven from their course.

19. And I saw a woman coming down from the hill-country, and she said to me: O man, whither art thou going? And I said: I am seeking an Hebrew midwife. And she answered and said unto me: Art thou of Israel? And I said to her: Yes. And she said: And who is it that is bringing forth in the cave? And I said: A woman betrothed to me. And she said to me: Is she not thy wife? And I said to her: It is Mary that was reared in the temple of the Lord, and I obtained her by lot as my wife. And yet she is not my wife, but has conceived of the Holy Spirit. And the widwife said to him: Is this true? And Joseph said to her: Come and see. And the midwife went away with him. And they stood in the place of the cave, and behold a luminous cloud overshadowed the cave. And the midwife said: My soul has been magnified this day, because mine eyes have seen strange things -- because salvation has been brought forth to Israel. And immediately the cloud disappeared out of the cave, and a great light shone in the cave, so that the eyes could not bear it. And in a little that light gradually decreased, until the infant appeared, and went and took the breast from His mother Mary. And the midwife cried out, and said: This is a great day to me, because I have seen this strange sight. And the midwife went forth out of the cave, and Salome met her. And she said to her: Salome, Salome, I have a strange sight to relate to thee: a virgin has brought forth -- a thing which her nature admits not of. Then said Salome: As

the Lord my God liveth, unless I thrust in my finger, and search the parts, I will not believe that a virgin has brought forth.

20. And the midwife went in, and said to Mary: Show thyself; for no small controversy has arisen about thee. And Salome put in her finger, and cried out, and said: Woe is me for mine iniquity and mine unbelief, because I have tempted the living God; and, behold, my hand is dropping off as if burned with fire. And she bent her knees before the Lord, saying: O God of my fathers, remember that I am the seed of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; do not make a show of me to the sons of Israel, but restore me to the poor; for Thou knowest, O Lord, that in Thy name I have performed my services, and that I have received my reward at Thy hand. And, behold, an angel of the Lord stood by her, saying to her: Salome, Salome, the Lord hath heard thee. Put thy hand to the infant, and carry it, and thou wilt have safety and joy. And Salome went and carried it, saying: I will worship Him, because a great King has been born to Israel. And, behold, Salome was immediately cured, and she went forth out of the cave justified. And behold a voice saying: Salome, Salome, tell not the strange things thou hast seen, until the child has come into Jerusalem.

21. And, behold, Joseph was ready to go into Judaea. And there was a great commotion in Bethlehem of Judaea, for Magi came, saying: Where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him. And when Herod heard, he was much disturbed, and sent officers to the Magi. And he sent for the priests, and examined them, saying: How is it written about the Christ? where is He to be born? And they said: In Bethlehem of Judaea, for so it is written. And he sent them away. And he examined the Magi, saying to them: What sign have you seen in reference to the king that has been born? And the Magi said: We have seen a star of great size shining among these stars, and obscuring their light, so that the stars did not appear; and we thus knew that a king has been born to Israel, and we have come to worship him. And Herod said: Go and seek him; and if you find him, let me know, in order that I also may go and worship him. And the Magi went out. And, behold, the star which they had seen in the east went before them until they came to the cave, and it stood over the top of the cave. And the Magi saw the infant with His mother Mary; and they brought forth from their bag gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned by the angel not to go into Judaea, they went into their own country by another road.

22. And when Herod knew that he had been mocked by the Magi, in a rage he sent murderers, saying to them: Slay the children from two years old and under. And Mary, having heard that the children were being killed, was afraid, and took the infant and swaddled Him, and put Him into an ox-stall. And Elizabeth,

having heard that they were searching for John, took him and went up into the hill-country, and kept looking where to conceal him. And there was no place of concealment. And Elizabeth, groaning with a loud voice, says: O mountain of God, receive mother and child. And immediately the mountain was cleft, and received her. And a light shone about them, for an angel of the Lord was with them, watching over them.

23. And Herod searched for John, and sent officers to Zacharias, saying: Where hast thou hid thy son? And he, answering, said to them: I am the servant of God in holy things, and I sit constantly in the temple of the Lord: I do not know where my son is. And the officers went away, and reported all these things to Herod. And Herod was enraged, and said: His son is destined to be king over Israel. And he sent to him again, saying: Tell the truth; where is thy son? for thou knowest that thy life is in my hand. And Zacharias said: I am God's martyr, if thou sheddest my blood; for the Lord will receive my spirit, because thou sheddest innocent blood at the vestibule of the temple of the Lord. And Zacharias was murdered about daybreak. And the sons of Israel did not know that he had been murdered.

24. But at the hour of the salutation the priests went away, and Zacharias did not come forth to meet them with a blessing, according to his custom. And the priests stood waiting for Zacharias to salute him at the prayer, and to glorify the Most High. And he still delaying, they were all afraid. But one of them ventured to go in, and he saw clotted blood beside the altar; and he heard a voice saying: Zacharias has been murdered, and his blood shall not be wiped up until his avenger come. And hearing this saying, he was afraid, and went out and told it to the priests. And they ventured in, and saw what had happened; and the fretwork of the temple made a wailing noise, and they rent their clothes from the top even to the bottom. And they found not his body, but they found his blood turned into stone. And they were afraid, and went out and reported to the people that Zacharias had been murdered. And all the tribes of the people heard, and mourned, and lamented for him three days and three nights. And after the three days, the priests consulted as to whom they should put in his place; and the lot fell upon Simeon. For it was he who had been warned by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death until he should see the Christ in the flesh.

25. But I James that wrote this history in Jerusalem, a commotion having arisen when Herod died, withdrew myself to the wilderness until the commotion in Jerusalem ceased, glorifying the Lord God, who had given me the gift and the wisdom to write this history. And grace shall be with them that fear our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory to ages of ages. Amen.

The Secret Book of James or The Apocryphon of James

The Secret Book of James, also called the "Apocryphon of James," is so secretive that of the twelve apostles, only James and Peter were informed of its message. And Peter does not seem to understand the true meaning of the text, leaving only James to preserve the valuable lessons from Jesus.

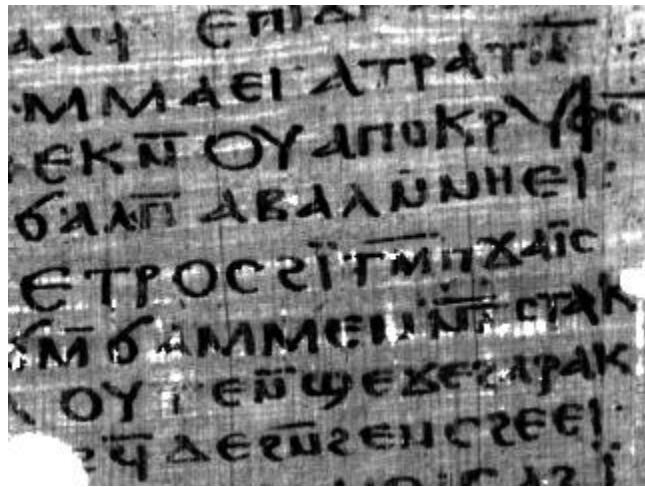
Though James claims that he had to write the letter "in Hebrew letters" to make sure it did not fall into the wrong hands, our version of the text, from the Nag Hammadi collection¹, is a Coptic translation of a Greek original that appears to have been lost to history.

In typical Gnostic form, the text can read like a riddle. James quotes Jesus: "This is why I told you, 'Be filled,' so that you will not lack. Those who lack will not be saved. To be filled is good and to lack is bad." So far, so good. But, "since it is also good for you to lack and bad for you to be filled, if you're filled you also lack...." That's the riddle. The answer — only slightly less baffling than the question — is that people should "be filled with spirit but lack in reason, because reason belongs to the soul."

The notions of "filled," "lacking," "spirit" and "soul" are part of an intricate theological and philosophical system (which is why some English versions don't even translate them) that contrasts fullness with lack and spirit with soul.

Alongside the complex theology, James relates new parables in Jesus's name. For instance, heaven's kingdom is like a palm whose dates have dropped to the ground. Though it's difficult now to decipher the ancient text, the point seems to be that the palm produced buds which dried up after they grew and produced their own fruit. Then that fruit did the same. And so on. So, too, Jesus's kingdom comes to those who can produce new plants.

¹ The Nag Hammadi Scriptures, Edited by Marvin Meyer; Advisory Board, Wolf-Peter Funk; Paul-Hubert Poirier, James M. Robinson. Introduction by Elaine H. Pagels. (Harper One).



Digitally enhanced detail of the Coptic text of The Secret Book of James, in which the word "apocryphon"¹ is visible at the end of the 3rd line.

According to the letter, this new parable complements "the Shepherds" (probably John 10:6-9), "the Seed" (Mark 4:26-29), "the Building" (Matthew 7:24-27), "the Lamps of the Young Women" (Matthew 25:1-13), "the Wage of the Workers" (Matthew 20:1-16), and so on.

As early as the 2nd century, St. Irenaeus [of Lyons] was insisting² that there had to be only four gospels because "there are four zones in the world" and "four principal winds." He condemned³ those who thought there were more than four as people who wanted it to seem as though they had discovered more truth than there really is.

This sounds a lot like the people who preserved the Secret Book of James. Yet while Irenaeus and others were dismissing their endeavors, they themselves were lamenting the narrow-sightedness of the emerging power structure, represented by Peter in the text here.

With the Secret Book of James, we have more insight into the debate that was raging only a few decades after Jesus died, and into the thinking of serious early Christians whose detailed work was almost lost completely.

Finally, important messages:

"Be careful not to let many people know about this book, which the Saviour did not even want all of us, his twelve disciples, to know about." (James)

"This is why I told you, "Be filled," so that you will not lack. Those who lack will not be saved. To be filled is good and to lack is bad." (Jesus)

Text

James writes to -----those²

Peace be with you from peace,
Love from love,
Grace from grace,
Faith from faith,
Life from holy life.³

James's Secret Books

You have asked me to send you a secret book revealed to Peter and me by the master, and I could not turn you down, nor could I speak to you, so I have written it in Hebrew and have sent it to you, and to you alone. But since you are a minister of the salvation of the saints, try to be careful not to reveal to many people this book that the saviour did not want to reveal even to all of us, his twelve students. Nonetheless, those who will be saved through the faith of this treatise will be blessed.

Ten months ago I sent you another secret book that the saviour revealed to me. Think of that book as revealed to me, James. But this one... .

Jesus addresses Peter and James

Now, the twelve students were all sitting together, recalling what the savior had said to each of them, whether in a hidden or an open manner, and organizing it in books.⁸ I was writing what is in my book. Look, the savior appeared, after he had left us, while we were watching for him.

Five hundred fifty days after he rose from the dead, we said to him, "Did you depart and leave us?"

² This is apparently James the just, the brother of Jesus and leader of the church in Jerusalem (see Gospel of Thomas 12), though here James is also part of the apostolic circle of the twelve.

³ These Lines are partially restored.

Jesus said, "No, but I shall return to the place from which I came. If you want to come with me, come."

They all answered and said, "If you order us, we shall come."

He said, "I tell you the truth, no one will ever enter the kingdom of heaven because I ordered it, but rather because you yourselves are filled. Leave James and Peter to me that I may fill them."

When he called the two of them, he took them aside and commanded the rest to keep doing what they were doing.

The saviour said, "You have been treated kindly,

... have not understood.

Do you not want to be filled?

Your hearts are drunk.

Do you not want to be sober?

You ought to be ashamed.

"From now on, awake or asleep, remember that you have seen the human son and have spoken with him and have listened to him.

"Shame on those who have seen the human son.

"Blessings will be on you who have not seen him, or associated with him, or spoken with him, or listened to anything from him. Yours is life.

"Understand that he healed you when you were sick, that you might reign.

"Shame on those who have found relief from their sickness, for they will relapse into sickness.

"Blessings on you who have not been sick, and have known relief before getting sick. The kingdom of god is yours.

"So I tell you: Be filled and leave no space in you empty, or he who is coming will mock you."

Being filled and lacking

Then Peter answered, "Look, three times you have told us, 'Be filled, but we are filled."

The saviour answered and said, "For this reason I have told you, 'Be filled; that you may not lack. Those who lack will not be saved. To be filled is good and to lack is bad. Yet since it is also good for you to lack but bad for you to be filled, whoever is filled also lacks. One who lacks is not filled in the way another who lacks is filled, but whoever is filled is brought to an appropriate end. So you should lack when you can fill yourselves and be filled when you lack,

that you may be able to fill yourselves more. Be filled with spirit but Jack in reason, for reason is of the soul. It is soul."

Believe in my cross

I answered and said to him, "Master, we can obey you if you wish, for we have forsaken our fathers and our mothers and our villages, and followed you. Give us the means not to be tempted by the evil devil."

The master answered and said, "What good is it to you if you do the father's will but you are not given your part of his bounty when you are tempted by Satan? But if you are oppressed by Satan and persecuted and do the father's will, I say he will love you, make you my equal, and consider you beloved through his forethought," and by your own choice. Won't you stop loving the flesh and fearing suffering? Don't you know that you have not yet been abused, unjustly accused, locked up in prison, unlawfully condemned, crucified without reason," or buried in the sand¹⁶ as I myself was by the evil one? Do you dare to spare the flesh, O you for whom the spirit is a wall surrounding you? If you consider how long the world has existed before you and how long it will exist after you, you will see that your life is but a day and your sufferings an hour. The good will not enter the world. Disdain death, then, and care about life. Remember my cross and my death, and you will live."

I answered and said to him, "Master, do not mention to us the cross and death, for they are far from you."

The master answered and said, "I tell you the truth, none will be saved unless they believe in my cross, for the kingdom of god belongs to those who have believed in my cross. Be seekers of death, then, like the dead who seek life, for what they seek becomes apparent to them. And what is there to cause them concern? As for you, when you search out death, it will teach you about being chosen. I tell you the truth: No one afraid of death will be saved, for the kingdom of death belongs to those who are put to death.¹⁸ Become better than I. Be like the child of the holy spirit."

Be eager for the Word

Then I asked him, "Master, can we prophesy to those who ask us to prophesy to them? There are many who bring a request to us and look to us to hear our pronouncement."

The master answered and said, "Do you not know that the head of prophecy was cut off with John?"²⁰

But I said, "Master, is it not impossible to remove the head of prophecy?"

The master said to me, "When you realize what `head' means, and that prophecy comes from the head, then understand the meaning of `its head was removed':

"First I spoke with you in parables, and you did not understand. Now I am speaking with you openly, and you do not grasp it. Nevertheless, you were for me a parable among parables and a disclosure among things revealed.

"Be eager to be saved without being urged. Rather, be fervent on your own and, if possible, outdo even me, for this is how the father will love you.

"Come to hate hypocrisy and evil intention. Intention produces hypocrisy, and hypocrisy is far from truth.

"Do not let the kingdom of heaven wither away. It is like a palm shoot whose dates dropped around it. It produced buds, and after they grew, its productivity dried up. This is also what happened with fruit that came from this single root. After it was harvested, fruit was obtained by many. It certainly was good. Is it not possible to produce the new growth now, and for you to find it?

"Since I was glorified like this once before, why do you hold me back when I am eager to go? After my labour you have made me stay with you another eighteen days because of the parables. For some people it was enough to listen to the teaching and understand 'The Shepherds,' "The Seed," The Building: 'The Lamps of the Young Women,' "The Wage of the Workers: and 'The Silver Coins and the Woman:

"Be eager for the word. The first aspect of the word is faith, the second is love, the third is works, and from these comes life.

"The word is like a grain of wheat. When someone sowed it, he had faith in it, and when it sprouted, he loved it, because he saw many grains instead of just one. And after he worked, he was saved because he prepared it as food and he still kept some out to sow.

"This is also how you can acquire the kingdom of heaven for yourselves. Unless you acquire it through knowledge, you will not be able to find it."

Understand the Light

"So I say to you, be sober. Do not go astray. And often have I said to you all together, and also to you clone, James, be saved. I have commanded you to follow me, and I have taught you how to speak before the rulers.

"See that I have come down and have spoken and have exerted myself and have won my crown when I saved you. I came down to live with you, so you might also live with me. And when I found that your houses had no roofs, I lived in houses that could receive me when I came down.

"Trust me, my brothers. Understand what the great light is. The father does not need me. A father does not need a son, but it is the son who needs the father. To him I am going, for the father of the son is not in need of you.

"Listen to the word, understand knowledge, love life, and no one will persecute you and no one will oppress you other than you yourselves."

Shame on you, blessings on you

"You wretches! You losers! You pretenders to truth! You falsifiers of knowledge! You sinners against the spirit! Do you still dare to listen when from the beginning you should have been speaking? Do you still dare to sleep when from the beginning you should have been awake so that the kingdom of heaven might receive you? I tell you the truth, it is easier for a holy person to sink into defilement, and for an enlightened person to sink into darkness, than for you to reign—or not to reign.

"I remember your tears, your mourning, and your grief. They are far from us. You who are outside the father's inheritance, weep when you should, mourn, and preach what is good. As is proper, the son is ascending.

"I tell you the truth, if I had been sent to those who would listen to me and had spoken with them, I would never have come down to earth. Now be ashamed.

"Look, I shall be leaving you and go away. I do not want to stay with you any longer just as you yourselves have not wanted this. Follow me quickly. I tell you, for you I came down. You are loved ones. You will bring life to many people. Invoke the father, pray to god frequently, and he will be generous with you.

"Blessings on one who has seen you with him when he is proclaimed among the angels and glorified among the saints. Yours is life. Rejoice and be glad as children of god. Observe his will that you may be saved. Accept correction from me and save yourselves. I am mediating for you with the father, and he will forgive you many things."

Few find the Kingdom of Heaven

When we heard this, we were delighted. We had become gloomy because of what we said earlier. But when he saw us happy, he said,

"Shame on you who are in need of an advocate.

"Shame on you who stand in need of grace.

"Blessings will be on those who have spoken out and acquired grace for themselves.

"Compare yourselves to foreigners. How are they viewed in your city? Why are you anxious to banish yourselves on your own and distance yourselves from your city? Why abandon your dwelling on your own and make it available for those who want to live in it? O, you exiles and runaways, shame on you. You will be captured.

"Or maybe you think that the father is a lover of people, or that he is won over by prayers, or that he is gracious to one because of another, or that he tolerates whoever is seeking?

"He knows about desire and what the flesh needs. Does it not desire the soul? The body does not sin apart from the soul just as the soul is not saved apart from the spirit. But if the soul is saved from evil and the spirit too is saved, the body becomes sinless. The spirit animates the soul but the body kills it. The soul kills itself.

"I tell you the truth, he will never forgive the sin of the soul or the guilt of the flesh, for none of those who have worn the flesh will be saved. Do you think that many have found the kingdom of heaven?

"Blessings on one who has seen oneself as a fourth one in heaven."

Know yourselves

When we heard this, we became sad. But when he saw that we were sad, he said, "I say this to you that you may know yourselves.³¹

"The kingdom of heaven is like a head of grain that sprouted in a field. And when it was ripe, it scattered its seed, and again it filled the field with heads of grain for

another year. So with you, be eager to harvest for yourselves a head of the grain of life that you may be filled with the kingdom.

"And as long as I am with you, pay attention to me and trust in me, but when I am far from you, remember me. And remember me because I was with you and you did not know me.

"Blessings will be on those who have known me.

"Shame on those who have heard and have not believed.

"Blessings will be on those who have not seen but yet have believed.

"And once again I appeal to you. I am disclosed to you as I am building a house useful to you when you find shelter in it, and it will support your neighbors' house when theirs threatens to collapse.

"I tell you the truth, shame on those for whom I was sent down here. "Blessings will be on those who are going up to the father.

"Again I warn you, you who are. Be like those who are not, that you may be with those who are not.

"Do not let the kingdom of heaven become a desert within you. Do not be proud because of the light that enlightens. Rather, act toward yourselves as I myself have toward you. I have put myself under a curse for you to save you."

The Last Word

Peter responded to these comments and said, "Sometimes you urge us on toward the kingdom of heaven, but at other times you turn us away, master. Sometimes you encourage us, draw us toward faith, and promise us life, but at other times you drive us away from the kingdom of heaven."

The master answered and said to us, "I have offered you faith many times and have revealed myself to you, James—and you have not known me. Now I see you often rejoicing. And although you are delighted about the promise of life, you are sad and gloomy when you are taught about the kingdom.

"Nevertheless, you, through faith and knowledge, have received life. So disregard rejection when you hear it, but when you hear about the promise, be joyful all the more.

"I tell you the truth, whoever will receive life and believe in the kingdom will never leave it, not even if the father wants to banish him.

"This is all I shall tell you at this time. Now I shall ascend to the place from which I have come. When I was eager to go, you have driven me off, and instead of accompanying me, you have chased me away.

"Be attentive to the glory that awaits me, and when you have opened your hearts, listen to the hymns that await me up in heaven. Today I must take my place at the right hand of my father.

"I have spoken my last word to you; I shall depart from you, for a chariot of spirit has carried me up, and from now on I shall strip that I may be clothed.

"Pay attention: Blessings on those who have proclaimed the son before he came down, so that, when I did come, I might ascend.

"Blessings three times over on those who were proclaimed by the son before they came into being, so that you might share with them."

The messengers disperse

When he said this, he left. We knelt down, Peter and I, and gave thanks and sent our hearts up to heaven. We heard with our ears and saw with our eyes the noise of wars, a trumpet blast, and great turmoil.

When we passed beyond that place, we sent our minds up further. We saw with our eyes and heard with our ears hymns, angelic praises and angelic rejoicing. Heavenly majesties were singing hymns, and we rejoiced too.

Again after this we wished to send our spirits up to the majesty. When we ascended, we were not allowed to see or hear anything. The other students called to us and asked us, "What did you hear from the teacher? What did he tell you? Where did he go?"

We answered them, "He ascended. He gave us his right hand, and promised all of us life. He showed us children coming after us, having commanded us to love them, since we are to be saved for their sakes.'

When they heard this, they believed the revelation, but they were angry about those who would be born. Not wishing to give them reason to take offense, I sent each of them to a different location. I myself went up to Jerusalem, praying that I might acquire a share with the loved ones who are to come.

I pray that the beginning may come from you.³⁸ This is how I can be saved. They will be enlightened through me, by my faith, and through another's that is better than mine. I wish mine to be the lesser.

Do your best to be like them, and pray that you may acquire a share with them. Beyond what I have said, the saviour did not disclose any revelation to us on their behalf. We proclaim a share with those for whom the message was proclaimed, those whom the lord has made his children.

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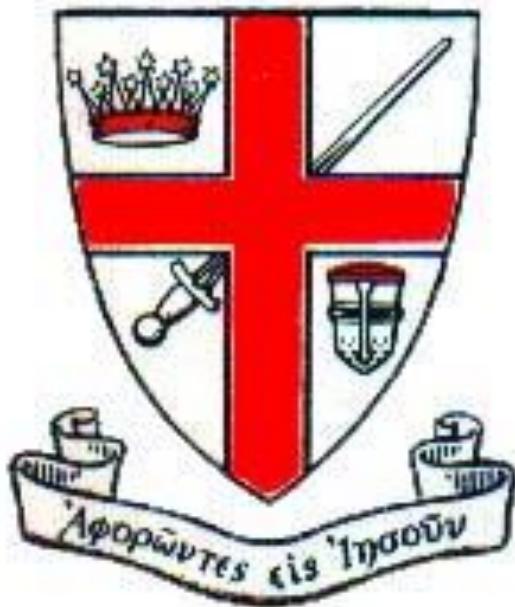
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